



UNION INTERPARLEMENTAIRE

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Constitutional & Parliamentary Information

*Half-yearly Review of the Association
of Secretaries General of Parliaments*

Welcome and Presentation of the Parliamentary System in Bahrain
(*Mr Rashid Bunajma, Bahrain*)

Alteration of the Australian Constitution: Role of the House of Representatives
(*Ms Claressa Surtees, Australia*)

Participation of Citizens
(*Mrs Barbara Dithapo, Botswana*)

Participation of Citizens – A Case of the Parliament of Zimbabwe
(*Mr Kennedy Mugove Chokuda, Zimbabwe*)

Engaging Citizens
(*Dr Remco Nehmelman, Netherlands*)

Petitioning in the UK House of Commons: a history and an e-revolution
(*Ms Sarah Davies, United Kingdom*)

Political participation of Citizens through Big Data Platform and AI Technology
(*Mr Kwang-jae Lee, Republic of Korea*)

Participation of Citizens
(*Mr Philippe Delivet, France*)

Sectoral Committees in the Parliament of Guyana
(*Mr Sherlock E. Isaacs, Guyana*)

Electing an Executive President by Parliament in extraordinary circumstances
(*Mr Dhammika Dasanayake, Sri Lanka*)

Gender inequality in parliaments – what are the solutions?
(*General Debate*)

Online voting system in the Spanish Senate
(*Mr Manuel Cervero, Spain*)

MPs and conflicts of interest
(*General Debate*)

The role of parliaments in combatting climate change
(*Mr Ahmed Manna, Egypt*)

Combatting climate change
(*Mr Rajit Punhani, India*)

Combatting climate change
(*Mr Abdullah Al-Masry Al-Fadil, Libya*)

Green parliaments
(*Mr Naim Çoban, Türkiye*)

The role of parliaments in combatting climate change
(*Dr Omar Al Nuaimi, United Arab Emirates*)

Climate Change
(*Ms Silvia Claudia Mihalcea, Romania*)

Questionnaire to create a best practice guide for 'Digital Parliaments'
(*Presentation*)

Questionnaire to share experiences on 'Welcoming New Members of Parliament'
(*Presentation*)

e-Initiative: The role of the House of Representatives in empowering voters to lodge a bill through the digital platform
(*Ms Steejit Taipiboonsuk, Thailand*)

The Role of Parliaments in fighting Intolerance, Promoting Peaceful Co-existence and Inclusive Societies
(*Mr Xolile George, South Africa*)

Review of the ASGP / 73rd year / N^o 222 / Manama, 12 – 15 March 2023

ASSOCIATION DES SECRETAIRES
GENERAUX DES PARLEMENTS



ASSOCIATION OF SECRETARIES
GENERAL OF PARLIAMENTS

MINUTES OF THE SPRING SESSION

MANAMA (BAHRAIN)

12-15 March 2023

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Aims

The Inter-Parliamentary Union, whose international Statute is outlined in a Headquarters Agreement drawn up with the Swiss federal authorities, is the only world-wide organisation of Parliaments.

The aim of the Inter-Parliamentary Union is to promote personal contacts between members of all Parliaments and to unite them in common action to secure and maintain the full participation of their respective States in the firm establishment and development of representative institutions and in the advancement of the work of international peace and cooperation, particularly by supporting the objectives of the United Nations.

In pursuance of this objective, the Union makes known its views on all international problems suitable for settlement by parliamentary action and puts forward suggestions for the development of parliamentary assemblies so as to improve the working of those institutions and increase their prestige.

Membership of the Union

Please refer to IPU site (<http://www.ipu.org>).

Structure

The organs of the Union are:

1. The Inter-Parliamentary Conference, which meets twice a year;
2. The Inter-Parliamentary Council, composed of two members of each affiliated Group;
3. The Executive Committee, composed of twelve members elected by the Conference, as well as of the Council President acting as *ex officio* President;
4. Secretariat of the Union, which is the international secretariat of the Organisation, the headquarters being located at:

Inter-Parliamentary Union
5, chemin du Pommier
Case postale 330
CH-1218 Le Grand Saconnex
Genève (Suisse)

Official Publication

The Union's official organ is the *Inter-Parliamentary Bulletin*, which appears quarterly in both English and French. The publication is indispensable in keeping posted on the activities of the Organisation. Subscription can be placed with the Union's secretariat in Geneva.

ASSOCIATION OF SECRETARIES GENERAL OF PARLIAMENTS

Minutes of the Spring Session 2022

**Manama
12-15 March 2023**

List of attendance

MEMBERS PRESENT

NAME	COUNTRY
Mr Pedro AGOSTINHO DE NERI	Angola
Mr Davit ARAKELYAN	Armenia
Ms Claressa SURTEES	Australia
Mr Alexis WINTONIAK	Austria
Mr Farid HAJIYEV	Azerbaijan
Mr Rashid BUNAJMA	Bahrain
Mrs Kareema ALABBASI	Bahrain
Mr K.M. Abdus SALAM	Bangladesh
Mrs Barbara DITHAPO	Botswana
Mrs Stefana KARASLAVOVA	Bulgaria
Mme Valérie SEMPORE SOUBEIGA	Burkina Faso
Mr OUM Sarith	Cambodia
Mr SRUN Dara	Cambodia
Mr Eric JANSE	Canada
Mr Ghislain Junior MORDJIM	Central African Republic
Dr Malo Adrien BEYOM	Chad

Mr Raul GUZMAN URIBE	Chile
Miguel LANDEROS PERKIC	Chile
Mr Jean NGUVULU KHOJI	Congo (Democratic Republic of)
Mr Jean MUKUALA BATEKE	Congo (Democratic Republic of)
Mr Aboubacar Sidiki DIOMANDE	Côte d'Ivoire
Mr Ahmed MANNA	Egypt
Mr Mahmoud ETMAN	Egypt
Mr Antero HABICHT	Estonia
Mr Kayima KEBEDE	Ethiopia
Mrs Jeanette EMBERSON	Fiji
Mr Abele SAKULU	Fiji
Ms Maija-Leena PAAVOLA	Finland
Mr Michel KENGUEL	Gabon
Dr Georg KLEEMANN	Germany
Mr Cyril NSIAH	Ghana
Mr Sherlock E. ISAACS	Guyana, Co-operative Republic of
Mr György SUCH	Hungary
Mrs Ragna ÁRNADÓTTIR	Iceland
Mr Safwan Basheer Younus AL JARJARY	Iraq
Ms Bridget DOODY	Ireland
Mr Awwad AL GHUWAIRI	Jordan
Mr Mohamed ALI	Kenya
Mr LEE Kwang-jae	Korea (Republic of)

Mr Khalid ALMUTAIRI	Kuwait
Mr Abdulla ALMASRI	Libya
Mrs Fiona KALEMBA	Malawi
Ms Fathimath NIUSHA	Maldives
Mr Modibo SIDIBE	Mali
Mrs Luvsandorj ULZIISAIKHAN	Mongolia
M. Najib EL KHADI	Morocco
M. Assad ZEROUALI	Morocco
Mr Tousy NAMISEB	Namibia
Mrs Lydia KANDETU	Namibia
Dr Bharat Raj GAUTAM	Nepal
Dr Remco NEHMELMAN	Netherlands
Mr Khalid AL SAADI	Oman
Mr Ahmed Mohammed AL NADABI	Oman
Mr Fahmi ZARIR	Palestine
Mr Renato N. BANTUG Jr.	Philippines
Mr Ahmad AL FADALA	Qatar
Ms Silvia MIHALCEA	Romania
M. Mario Ovidiu OPREA	Romania
Mr Mohamed ALMUTAIRI	Saudi Arabia
Mr Amadou THIMBO	Senegal
Mr Srdjan SMILJANIĆ	Serbia
Mr Daniel GUSPAN	Slovakia

Mr Abdelnasir GULED	Somalia
Mr Xolile GEORGE	South Africa
Mr Masibulele XASO	South Africa
Mr Makuc Makuc NGONG	South Sudan
Mr Manuel CAVERO	Spain
Mr Dhammika DASANAYAKE	Sri Lanka
Mr Ingvar MATTSON	Sweden
Ms Napaporn JAISAJJA	Thailand
Mrs Pornpith PHETCHAREON	Thailand
Ms Steejit TAIPIBOONSUK	Thailand
Mr João Rui AMARAL	Timor Leste
Mr Adolf MWESIGE KASAIJA	Uganda
Mr Paul GAMUSI WABWIRE	Uganda
Dr Omar AL NUAIMI	United Arab Emirates
Mrs Afra ALBASTI	United Arab Emirates
Ms Sarah DAVIES	United Kingdom
Ms Chloe MAWSON	United Kingdom
Dr José Pedro MONTERO	Uruguay
Mr Gustavo Sánchez PIÑEIRO	Uruguay
Mr Fernando Ripoll FALCONE	Uruguay
Mr CUONG Bui Van	Vietnam
Mr Roy NGULUBE	Zambia
Mr Kennedy Mugove CHOKUDA	Zimbabwe

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Mr Jasem ALNUSIF	Arab ASGP
Mr John MUTEKA	East African Legislative Assembly (EALA)
Mr Said MOKADEM	Maghreb Consultative Council

SUBSTITUTES

(for Mr/s)	
Mr Mohamed BARKA [for Mr Mohamed Drissi DADA]	Algeria
Mr Philippe DELIVET [for Mr Eric TAVERNIER]	France
Mr Frank SOBOLEWSKI [for Dr Michael SCHÄFER]	Germany
<i>Mr Rajit PUNHANI [for Mr Pramod Chandra MODY]</i>	India
Mr Sumariyandono SOEDOMO [for Dr Indra ISKANDAR]	Indonesia
Mr Tomoya KONDO [for Mr Fumitake KOBAYASHI]	Japan
Mr Miarintsoa RAKOTOMALALA [for Mr Calvin RANDRIAMAHAFANJARY]	Madagascar
Mr Mauro MANGERA [for Mr Alfredo Vasco Nogueira NAMPETE]	Mozambique
Mr Jose Antonio TUAÑO [for Mr Reginald S. VELASCO]	Philippines
Ms Natalia JASKIEWICZ [for Mrs Agnieszka KACZMARSKA]	Poland
Ms Agata KARWOWSKA-SOKOLOWSKA [for Mr Adam NIEMCZEWSKI]	Poland
Mr Rui COSTA [for Mr Albino de Azevedo SOARES]	Portugal
Mr Rattan Naresh ALGOE [for Mrs Ruth Lucia DE WINDT]	Suriname

Mr Mathew KILEO [for Mrs Nanelwa Joyce MWAHAMBI]	Tanzania (United Republic of)
Mr Naim ÇOBAN [for Mr Mehmet Ali KUMBUZOĞLU]	Türkiye

ALSO PRESENT

Mr Abdul Qader ARYUBI	Afghanistan
Ms Aikaterini KARTSAKLI	Greece
Ms Foteini TSOUNI	Greece
Ms Pernille DELEURAN	Denmark
Mr K. Arap KIRUI	Kenya
Ms Vibeke RYSST-JENSEN	Norway
Mr Alfredo BESAS	Philippines
Ms Agata KARWOWSKA-SOKOLOWSKA	Poland
Mr João COELHO	Portugal
Ms Andreea Elena CLERAS	Romania
Ms Roxana TRUINEA	Romania
Mr Leo SIBANDA	South Africa
Mr Barnabas BYALWA	Zambia
Mr Asha JENJE	Zimbabwe
Mrs Yapoka Nyirenda MUNGANDI	SADC PA

APOLOGIES

Mrs Catherine LEROY	France
Mr Eric TAVERNIER	France
Dr Michael SCHÄFER	Germany

Dr Silke ALBIN	Germany
Mr Georgios MYLONAKIS	Greece
<i>Mr Pramod Chandra MODY</i>	India
Mr Fumitake KOBAYASHI	Japan
Mr Fumiyasu ITO	Japan
Mr Sosthène CYITATIRE	Rwanda
Mrs Ruth Lucia DE WINDT	Suriname
Mr Philippe SCHWAB	Switzerland
Mrs Nenelewa Joyce MWAHAMBI	Tanzania (United Republic of)
Sir John BENDER	United Kingdom
Mr Simon BURTON	United Kingdom
Mrs Despina CHATZIVASSILIOU-TSOVILIS	Council of Europe

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FIRST SITTING

Sunday 12 March 2023 (morning)

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, in the Chair

The sitting was opened at 11.05am

1. Opening of the session

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, opened the session, speaking in Arabic, and welcomed members of the Association. He extended his thanks and gratitude to our hosts, the Shura Council and House of Representatives of the Kingdom of Bahrain, for their welcome to this noble land and to the Secretary Generals in particular for organising an excellent cultural programme, which enabled members to have informal exchanges and learn about the rich history of Bahrain.

He noted the pleasingly large number of members in attendance at the event, due to the end of pandemic restrictions there were approximately 100 participants at the session and wished new members a particularly warm welcome. He announced that interpretation for the session would be provided in English, French, Arabic, Korean, Turkish and Portuguese.

2. Members

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, told the Association that the secretariat had received the following requests for membership which had been put before the Executive Committee and agreed to, as follows:

For membership:

Mr Davit ARAKELYAN	Secretary General of the National Assembly, Armenia
Mrs Kareema ALABBASI	Secretary General of the Shura Council, Bahrain
Mrs Stefana KARASLAVOVA	Secretary General of the National Assembly, Bulgaria
Mr Ferdinand SINDARIRONKA	Secretary General of the National Assembly, Burundi
Mr Eric JANSE	Acting Clerk of the House of Commons, Canada
Mr Jean MUKUALA BATEKE	Secretary General of the Senate, Democratic Republic of the Congo
Mr Safwan Basheer AL GERGERI	Secretary General of the Council of Representatives, Iraq

Mr Fumiyasu ITO	Deputy Secretary General of the House of Councillors, Japan
Mr Awwad AL GHUWAIRI	Secretary General of the House of Representatives, Jordan
Mr Khalid ALMUTAIRI	Secretary General of the National Assembly, Kuwait
Mr Assad ZEROUALI	Secretary General of the House of Councillors, Morocco
Mr Alfredo Vasco Nogueira NAMPETE	Secretary General of the Assembly of the Republic, Mozambique
Mr Fahmi ZARIR	Secretary General of the National Council, Palestine
Mr José Francisco CEVASCO PIEDRA	Secretary General of the Congress of the Republic, Peru
Mr Renato N. BANTUG Jr.	Secretary General of the Senate, Philippines
Mr Reginald S. VELASCO	Secretary General of the House of Representatives, Philippines
Ms Chloe MAWSON	Clerk Assistant of the House of Lords, United Kingdom

The new Members were accepted.

3. Orders of the day

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, recalled that the agenda for the meeting had been circulated to members via email and the latest version, approved by the Executive Committee, was available on the website.

Sunday 12 March (morning)

9am

Meeting of the Executive Committee

11 am

- *Opening of the session*
- *Orders of the day for the conference*
 - *New members*
- *Announcement regarding elections*

- *Welcome and brief presentation on the parliamentary system in Bahrain*

Theme: In the news

- *Communication by Mr Raúl Guzmán Uribe, Secretary General of the Chilean Senate on 'Improvement of the administrative processes in the Chilean Senate'*

- *Communication by Ms Claressa Surtees, Clerk of the House of Representatives, Parliament of Australia on 'Alteration of the Australian Constitution: Role of the House of Representatives'*

Sunday 12 March (afternoon)

2.30 pm

- *Presentation on recent developments in the Inter-Parliamentary Union*

THEME: Participation of citizens in the work of Parliament

- *Communication by Ms Barbara Dithapo, Clerk of the National Assembly, Botswana on 'Participation of citizens'*
- *Communication by Mr Ahmed Mohammed Al Nadabi, Secretary General of the Shura Council of Oman on 'Participation of citizens in the work of Parliament'*
- *Communication by Mr Kennedy Mugove Chokuda, Clerk of Parliament of Zimbabwe, on 'Participation of Citizens - A Case of the Parliament of Zimbabwe'*
- *Communication by Dr Remco Nehmelman, Secretary General of the Senate of the Netherlands on 'Engaging citizens'*
- *Communication by Ms Sarah Davies, Clerk Assistant, House of Commons, UK, 'Petitioning in the UK House of Commons: a history and an e-revolution'*
- *Communication by Mr Kwang-jae Lee, Secretary General of Korean National Assembly, on 'Political participation of Citizens through Big Data Platform and AI Technology'*
- *Communication by Mr Philippe Delivet, Director of International Affairs and Protocol, French Senate on 'Participation of citizens'*

Monday 13 March (morning)

9 am

Meeting of the Executive Committee

10 am

- *Communication by Mr Sherlock E. Isaacs, Secretary General, Parliament of Guyana on 'Sectoral Committees in the Parliament of Guyana'*
- *Communication by Mr Dhammika Dasanayake, Secretary General of Parliament of Sri Lanka on 'Electing an Executive President by Parliament in extraordinary circumstances'*

General Debate: Gender inequality in parliaments - what are the solutions?

Moderator: Mr Bharat Gautam, Secretary General of the parliament of Nepal

- - *What are the obstacles to achieving gender parity in parliaments?*
 - *What solutions are being implemented in your parliament?*
- *How are members of staff protected from bullying and sexual harassment?*

Monday 13 March (afternoon)

2.30 pm

Lunch organised by the Parliament of Bahrain.

Visit to the Parliament

*Meeting point to be confirmed.
Secretaries-General will be returned to their hotels.*

Tuesday 14 March (morning)

9.30am

Meeting of the Executive Committee

- *Communication by Mr Manuel Cavero, Secretary General of the Spanish Senate, on 'Online voting system in the Spanish Senate'*

General debate with informal discussion groups: MPs and conflicts of interest

*Moderator: Mr Bharat Gautam
Themes for informal discussion groups:*

What constitutes a conflict interest?

Should MPs be able to work in other roles while also being parliamentarians ? Which jobs add value to the work of parliamentarians ?

How do we manage conflicts of interest : What are the rules for MPs ? What are the rules for parliamentary staff and assistants

Tuesday 14 March (afternoon)

2.30pm

Presentation on recent developments at the Centre for Innovation in Parliament

THEME: The role of parliaments in combatting climate change

- *Communication by Mr Ahmed Manna, Secretary General of Egyptian House of Representatives, on 'The role of parliaments in combatting climate change'*
- *Communication by Mr Rajit Punhani, Secretary to Rajya Sabha of India, on 'Combatting climate change'*
- *Communication by Mr Abdullah Al-Masry Al-Fadil, Secretary General of the Libyan Parliament on 'Combatting climate change'*
- *Communication by Mr Naim ÇOBAN, Deputy Secretary General of Grand National Assembly of Türkiye on 'Green parliaments'*

- *Communication by Dr Omar Al Nuaimi, Secretary General of the Federal National Council, UAE, on 'The role of parliaments in combatting climate change'*

Wednesday 15 March (morning)

9am

Meeting of the Executive Committee

*

Presentation on questionnaire to create a best practice guide for 'Digital Parliaments'

- *Communication by Ms Steejit Taipiboonsuk, Deputy Secretary General of the House of Representatives of Thailand, 'e-Initiative: The role of the House of Representatives in empowering voters to lodge a bill through the digital platform'*
- *Communication by Mr Xolile George, Secretary to the Parliament, South Africa on "The Role of Parliaments in fighting Intolerance, Promoting Peaceful Co-existence and Inclusive Societies"*

*

- *Administrative questions*
- *Draft agenda for the next meeting in Autumn 2023*

12.30

Closure of the session

The agenda for the Session was agreed to.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, first thanked members for volunteering to present the communications and general debates on the agenda. He said that given the large number of contributions, he would like to remind colleagues of the speaking limits:

- **10 minutes** for moderators of general debates
- **10 minutes** for the presentation of a communication, not including questions; and
- **5 minutes** for all other oral interventions

He emphasised that, in order to ensure everyone has the opportunity to speak, he would be enforcing the rules on time limits very strictly. He asked the Association to prepare their comments accordingly.

He reminded the Association that, written versions of the communication being presented on the agenda are available, in English and French, on the ASGP website.

The sessions of the ASGP will rise at 12.30pm for lunch, and finish at 5.30pm.

He invited members to begin thinking about themes and general debates for the Autumn session.

4. Membership fees

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, reminded the Association that membership fees are essential to the working of the Association. He announced that most members are now up-to-date with the payment of their fees. He invited anyone who is unsure of their payment situation to contact the secretariat.

He reminded colleagues that the membership fee is payable for each chamber and raised the issue of some parliaments wishing to pay a single payment for both chamber, this is against the rules. He encouraged Secretary's General to be vigilant about this issue.

Finally, he reminded members that under the rules of the Association members can be suspended if they have not paid for 3 years and have their voting rights suspended after 2 years.

5. Executive Committee elections

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, reminded members that it was possible there would be two elections held during the Kigali session.

- A post of Vice-President of the Association to replace Charles Robert. The deadline for applications is 5pm today, any election would take place tomorrow at midday.
- A post of ordinary member of the Executive Committee is open to application. The deadline for applications is 5pm on 14 March, any election would take place on Wednesday 15 March.

He reminded Members of the Association's rules regarding ensuring a diversity of gender, geographical spread and language on the Executive Committee. He further highlighted that only Members present in Bahrain could stand for election, the pandemic conditions for remote election are no longer in place following a decision by the Executive Committee.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, emphasized that only members who have paid their subscription fees may vote or stand as candidates for election. Finally, he advised any members who was unsure about their membership fees to speak to the secretariat.

6. Collaboration with the IPU

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, noted that the ASGP would work together with the IPU in the following ways during the Bahrain session:

- Kareen Jabre would address the ASGP on the recent developments in the IPU programme.
- Andy Richardson would update the Association about recent developments with the Centre for Innovation in Parliament.

- Mr El Khadi and Andy Richardson would provide an update on progress towards creating the ‘Best practice guide on digitalisation’.

He further reminded Members that the IPU will be organizing an informal focus group discussion on “Parliaments owning their institutional development”, in relation to the Common Principles for Support to Parliament, on 15 March.

7. Welcome and brief presentation from Mr Rashid Bunajma, Secretary General of the Council of Representatives, on the parliamentary system in Bahrain

His Excellency Mr Rashid Bunajma, Secretary General of the Council of Representatives, spoke as follows:

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful Praise be to Allah, and may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon Prophet Mohammad, his kin, and companions.

Your Excellency Mr. Najib El Khadi, President of the Association of Secretaries General, Your Excellencies the Secretaries General, Esteemed audience,

May the peace, mercy, and blessings of Allah be upon you all,

In the beginning, it gives me great pleasure to welcome Your Excellencies, the Secretaries General of the Parliaments of the Member States participating in the work of the 146th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and its accompanying meetings, which are held on the land of love, coexistence, and tolerance, and we wish you all a good stay in the Kingdom of Bahrain. We are grateful to His Excellency Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, for his efforts exerted in building bridges of parliamentary cooperation, and exchanging views on all that would consolidate relations and enhance means of joint cooperation between the parliaments of member states, which the Kingdom of Bahrain has been keen on, and with unremitting efforts by both the legislative and executive authorities, to provide the means of success for our meetings, while wishing this association success in achieving its desired goals.

It is our pleasure that the Kingdom of Bahrain is hosting the largest international parliamentary gathering, to discuss important and sensitive issues, foremost of which is the general theme, "Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies: fighting intolerance", as this reflects what the Kingdom of Bahrain is known for as a country of coexistence and tolerance since ancient times, this is highlighted by the values of pluralism, diversity, the spirit of tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and the fight against extremism, hatred, and racism in the Kingdom, and what it affirms and calls for in various regional and international forums.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, The joint international action on its various stages can only be achieved through international partnership, concerted efforts, unification, and work to promote and support integration between countries and their peoples. The meetings of parliament speakers in international forums only

highlights the important role of legislative institutions in the world, to address issues and support the international community in reaching visions, perceptions, and effective solutions, and within that context, the importance of the meetings of the secretaries general comes to exchange visions, coordinate and organize efforts, and push them forward to develop the performance of the secretariats of the councils to reach the level that everyone desires, which is reflected in the support of the multilateral cooperation path. Since the Kingdom of Bahrain joined the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, there has been a constant keenness to participate in meetings and events, because of their pivotal role and the opportunity it provides, especially with regard to the exchange of information, training, and learning about the experiences and practices of international parliaments, and we saw this in its repercussions on the efficiency of employees, developing their capabilities and skills, proposing measures to improve work procedures, and providing legal and technical assistance.

Whereas here we must pay tribute to the positive and effective role played by the Secretariat of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and its efforts since its inception within the international system of the Union, and the environment it provides to enhance dialogue and cooperation between member parliaments, consultation on various issues of common concern, dealing with data, and highlighting positions on the crucial issues and challenges on the international scene.

We hope that the Assembly in Bahrain will be an added step to the path of joint international parliamentary cooperation, and that we will achieve the aspirations and hopes that everyone aspires to regarding the issues under discussion.

May the peace, mercy, and blessings of Allah be upon you.



Mr Najib El Khadi, President thanked the member for their presentation and commented that the parliamentary administration in Bahrain is known to be a very advanced system. He expressed his own pleasure and honour to have visited the Chamber of Representatives in Bahrain to witness debates and highlighted the interesting use of information technology and excellent research projects.

He then invited questions from the floor on the operation of the Bahraini parliament.

Dr Bharat Raj Gautam (Nepal) asked about the committee system in the parliament of Bahrain.

Dr Omar AL NUAIMI (UAE) commented that Bahrain's use of research and technology was cutting edge. He said the parliament's use of social media is very impressive and called on colleagues to closely follow this effort.

Mr Rashid Bunajma (Bahrain), responded to Dr Gautam that the Bahrain parliament has 40 members who are directly elected, there are 5 standing committees, and that members can apply to be part of the standing committees. The

candidacy of committees is distributed on the basis of work experience and balance across committees. The proposed distribution is presented to Members for approval. Every committee has a President and Vice-President who carry out their work without interference. The President determines when the Committee convenes and commissions research work.

Speaking in response to the social media remarks, he said they have teams that coordinate their social media image and engage with citizens. They also have an electronic response for citizens based on the principal of social participation. The Bahrain Parliament communicates everything that happens in its Chambers and takes into account the comments of its citizens.

Gilbert NDJIBU (Congo) asked how many women are in the parliament in Bahrain and asked for a copy of the procedures of the parliament of Bahrain in order to undertake further study.

Mr Rashid Bunajma (Bahrain) responded that out of 40 members in the House of Representatives there are 8 women, in the Shura Council there are 9 women out of 40 members. It is therefore around 20% in both chambers. He confirmed that a copy of the procedures could be provided to all members of the Association.

8. Communication from Ms Claressa Surtees, Clerk of the House of Representatives, Parliament of Australia on ‘Alteration of the Australian Constitution: Role of the House of Representatives’

Ms Claressa Surtees, Clerk of the House of Representatives, Parliament of Australia spoke as follows:

Introduction

Australia has a written constitution which establishes a bicameral federal parliament comprised of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The final provisions in the Constitution stipulate requirements for alteration of the Constitution. (Chapter VIII, section 128)

While the Parliament may not alone change the Constitution, it nevertheless has a role in initiating a proposed law for altering the Constitution, as prescribed by section 128.

Passage through the Parliament

A proposal to alter the Constitution must be initiated, by means of a bill, in either of the two Houses of the Parliament. In most respects the passage of an alteration bill is the same as for an ordinary bill, including that it must pass each House of the Parliament. In principle and detail debates As for ordinary bills, an alteration bill is read a first time on its introduction to the House of Representatives, and an in principle debate takes place before the bill is read a second time. The second reading

is followed by debate to consider the alteration bill in detail. This debate is followed by the third reading, after which the alteration bill is sent to the Senate. Section 128 provides for two exceptions in the passage of a bill proposing to alter the Constitution.

Requirement for an absolute majority in final voting

The first exception applies in relation to the passage of every constitution alteration bill. At the third reading, or final stage of passage, the bill must be agreed to by an absolute majority (50% + 1) of each House of the Parliament. Currently the House has 151 Members, and so an absolute majority is 76 Members. (The Senate has 76 Senators, and so an absolute majority is 39.) By contrast, an ordinary bill, will be passed in the House of Representatives at the third reading stage with the support of only a simple majority of Members who are present when the vote is taken.

Alteration bill passed by one House only

A second exception would apply to overcome disagreement between the two Houses, such that an alteration bill passes one House and the other House rejects or fails to pass the bill, or passes it with an amendment to which the originating House will not agree. In this case, after three months, the originating House may again pass the proposed law, with an absolute majority, with or without any amendment made or agreed to by the other House.

If the other House once more rejects or fails to pass the bill to alter the Constitution, or passes it with any amendment to which the originating House will not agree, the Governor General may submit the proposed law, as last proposed by the originating House, to the electors of Australia at a referendum.

Referendum of all electors of Australia

Once an alteration bill has completed its passage through the two Houses of Parliament, in satisfaction of the requirements of section 128 of the Constitution, if a referendum is to be held, the proposed law must be submitted to a referendum of electors in each State and Territory. The referendum must be held between two and six months after passage of the proposed law through the Parliament.

Voting thresholds for a constitutional referendum

To achieve an alteration of the Constitution, the alteration proposal must be put to a referendum of the Australian electorate in which the proposal must be approved by a majority of all electors voting, as well as by a majority of voters in a majority of States. When those voting thresholds are achieved in terms of the six Australian States, the proposed law shall be presented to the Governor-General for assent. There is also a measure in section 128 to preserve the integrity of each State. If the amending bill proposes to alter the Constitution by diminishing the proportionate parliamentary representation of any State in either House, or the minimum number of representatives of a State in the House of Representatives, or altering the limits of

the State, the majority of electors voting in the State affected by the proposal must approve the bill.

More than 100 years of referendum results

Since Australian Federation, in 1901, Australians have voted in referendums for 44 separate proposals to alter the Constitution. Thirty-one referendums received neither a favourable majority of electors in a majority of States nor a favourable majority of all electors. Five achieved a favourable majority of all electors but not a favourable majority of electors in a majority of States.

Only eight proposals have succeeded in securing the majorities necessary to bring about the amendment. The last referendum was conducted in 1999, unsuccessfully. The last successful referendums were achieved in 1977, when four were conducted at one time and three were successful.

Probable future referendums

It is expected that the next referendum to alter the Constitution will be held this year, in 2023. In 2017, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples gathered at a National Constitutional Convention. The communique from this gathering, the Uluru Statement from the Heart is a call by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for real and practical change in Australia by delivering constitutional recognition through a Voice to Parliament and the establishment of a 'Makarrata Commission', to undertake processes of treaty-making and truth-telling. The Prime Minister, who came to office at a general election in May 2022, has announced the Government's aim of holding a referendum in the second half of 2023 for alteration of 4 the Constitution to establish constitutional recognition of Australia's First Nations people and provide for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. The Voice and a referendum are being increasingly discussed in Parliament and throughout the Australian community, although formal parliamentary processes are yet to commence. I would be pleased to make a further communication about the outcome of any process of constitutional alteration commenced this year.



Ms Sarah Davies (UK) asked, based on the UK experience, if Australia has ever had difficulty in choosing the precise wording of the referendum question and whether there is a framework for resolving disputes on the wording of the question?

Mr Manuel CAVERO (Spain) asked whether the parliament has met the challenge of the people, as only 8 of 44 referenda has succeeded, which might suggests a gap between parliamentarians and the people in Australia. In Spain, there have been two reforms of the constitution which have produced minor changes. He said that MPs in Spain do not generally dare to go to the people about the constitution as they are not sure what the people want or would say?

Mr Mahmoud Etman (Egypt) asked what is the demand of the first people with regards to constitutional amendments?

Dr Malo Adrien BEYOM (Tchad) asked whether indigenous populations meant traditional populations, whether they have access to parliament and whether there are any laws in parliament which stop their access to parliament.

Mr Rashid Bunjama (Bahrain) noted that Australia needs 50 +1 for a constitutional change and asked how many people have to sign for it to be valid?

Mr George Xolile (South Africa) also noted the majority of 50 + 1 and asked about the rate for a simple majority and asked whether there was a negation system, or right to veto, between the two houses. He asked what happens if one House passes it and the other rejects, is there a mediation process. Also whether there is a 10% or 20% threshold?

Mr Jose Pedro, Vice-President of the Association (Uruguay) noted that for the referendum to be approved it must obtain a majority of all the votes in the country. He asked does that mean of all the votes cast, including cancelled votes? If it counts all casts votes, not all valid votes, that is a different majority.

Ms Claressa Surtees (Australia) responded that, with regards to the wording of the question, to be brutally honest it is a political issue. The Bill would be introduced by the Government, so it is the PM who has the final say on the nature of the question. Bills for the parliament to consider have a long title, it is there that the question is placed, therefore it is known at an early stage. The Government has a strong influence, the ability to compromise can only come from the Government and they may do so if that would improve the question's success.

In response to Spain, regarding a possible disconnection between Parliament and the people, she agreed it is a poor record of achievement, 8 of 44 and none since 1977 is not impressive. She said some countries have detailed constitutions, Australia does not, it provides a simple baseline on what should be possible. In terms of the final arbiter, it is the High Court, if something was argued to be in contravention of the constitution it would be a question for the High Court, not for the Parliament. In terms of getting proposals through the electorate, there is a practice of supporting information campaign for voters, there is a 'yes campaign' and a 'no campaign' which educates voters about how they might exercise their vote. She proposed that maybe the argument made by the campaigns has not been very persuasive. She commented that some good proposals have not been put forward because of fear of failure.

In response to Egypt, she said the original constitution did not recognise the existence of indigenous people. When forming the first constitution, the people at the table were the colonial representatives. In the 18th Century it was these settlers who made a decision. When Australia became a Federation in 1901, people involved in negotiating did not represent indigenous people. The indigenous people have no rights under the constitution as a result. The people have now put forward this proposal to fundamentally acknowledge the pre-existence of indigenous people and to provide a route for them to access Government and Parliament.

In response to Tchad, she said indigenous people live everywhere in Australia, both in cities and in traditional communities, they are interested in achieving a level of equality they have yet to feel in Australia since colonial populations arrived. They see the constitutional change as a significant opportunity to have their requirements met and access to parliament. At the moment, there is the highest number of indigenous people in Parliament, they have been elected under normal rules as there is currently no quota. It is about 12% of parliamentarians which is greater than the size of the indigenous population proportionally. What is being proposed is the right to have access to all areas of Australian life. They want to make a contribution at a formative stage of governing process.

In response to Bahrain, she said they do not have a signing system in Australia. Proposals come forward from the Government, there is not a right to propose changes to the constitution outside of this.

In response to South Africa, she said the parliament can convene committees to resolve difficulties on many topics. The mechanism which is expressly provided to deal with deadlock and ensure that where a proposal which has passed the originating House twice, but fails to get the agreement of the other House, there is a way through. The people are not denied the opportunity to consider the proposals. The thresholds are very high to alter the constitution. The last unsuccessful referendum, on the topic of the republic, did not get a majority in any state. It succeeded in the capital, where it was voted for overwhelmingly, but nowhere else. The States have a special priority, over the capital, with regards to altering the constitution.

In response to Uruguay, she said all the eligible voters are not counted but all of the voters who voted are counted. In Australia voting is mandatory, which underscores the importance of making sure that voters are well informed about the question. She confirmed we must not compel people to vote for something they don't understand.

9. Concluding remarks

Mr Najib El Khadi, President thanked members for their interesting contributions and reminded them to return to the room at 2.30pm for the afternoon session.

He closed the sitting.

The sitting ended at 12.25pm

SECOND SITTING

Sunday 12 March 2023 (afternoon)

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, in the Chair

The sitting was opened at 2.40pm

1. Introductory remarks

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, opened the sitting and welcomed members back into the room. He set out the items on the agenda for the afternoon, starting with a presentation from Kareen Jabre, Thomas Fitzsimmons and Andy Richardson on the work of the IPU. He reminded colleagues of the 5pm deadline for submitting candidacy for the vacant post of Vice-President of the Association.

He welcomed Ms Kareen Jabre and invited her to update members on recent developments in the IPU.

2. Presentation on recent developments in the IPU

Ms Kareen Jabre, IPU, reiterated the importance for the IPU of the partnership with the ASGP. She was very pleased to present recent developments with regard to the IPU's work to implement the 2022-2026 Strategy.

She referred to the 2022 Impact Report that had just been launched in Manama which provides an overview of activities carried out during the year as well as evidence of change, with numerous case studies of impact (<https://www.ipu.org/file/16402/download>).

In terms of recent developments, she drew attention to the IPU Women in Parliament 2022 report (<https://www.ipu.org/file/16320/download>) and the IPU-UN Women Women in Politics Map (<https://www.ipu.org/file/16336/download>) that had just been launched. Both reports shed light to slow progress in terms of women's representation in Parliament and in politics more generally. The reports also emphasized how violence against women in parliament constituted a major challenge and barrier for women who wished to enter politics.

Ms Jabre went on to introduce the work of the IPU in the area of climate change. The IPU Strategy 2022-2026 includes climate action as one of its key policy goals. During this period the IPU will further help parliaments make progress on and increase accountability for the Paris Agreement, accelerate decarbonisation, and reduce their carbon footprint at an institutional level. The IPU supports parliaments on climate change through 1) capacity-building and technical support, 2) producing knowledge products specifically designed for parliamentarians and, 3) fostering inter-parliamentary knowledge sharing, for example at high level events such as the UN Climate Change conferences (COPs).

The IPU provides tailored technical support at the national, regional and global levels on climate and environment-related issues. Parliaments and Secretaries-General should not hesitate to reach out if of interest.

Mr Fitzsimmons, IPU, presented the new campaign launched in Manama called Parliaments for the Planet (<https://www.ipu.org/parliaments-planet>). The campaign is designed to mobilize parliaments and parliamentarians to act on the climate emergency. The campaign is centered on the idea that climate action begins at home. The campaign is made up of two parts:

1. My parliament!

Part 1 of the campaign will encourage parliaments and those who work in them to reduce their carbon footprint and become greener.

2. My planet!

Overlapping with Part 1 of the campaign, Part 2 will help parliaments step up action through legislation, budgets and, in particular, scrutiny of government measures to implement the Paris Agreement on climate.

Mr Fitzsimmons invited parliaments, parliamentarians and Secretaries general and their colleagues to support the campaign including by 1) calculating their carbon footprint at the IPU communications stand, 2) picking up a copy of the newly released '10 actions for a greener parliament' publication' and 3) inform the IPU of the actions they are taking to become greener and more sustainable. This was the beginning of a series of initiatives in which the IPU was keen to engage the ASGP.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked Ms Jabre and Mr Richardson for their excellent presentation and invited questions from the floor.

Mr Naim ÇOBAN (Türkiye), asked whether budgeting is among the indicators?

Ms Al Abbasi (Bahrain) said that, with reference to gender parity, she would like to invite all members to an open discussion on aspects of gender parity which is being held to highlight successes made by Bahraini women in democratic participation. Secondly, on making parliaments greener, she noted that Bahrain is now paperless up to 90% and that the pandemic had sped up the process of making the secretariat paperless.

Andy Richardson, responding to Turkey, said there are 25 indicators which cover all areas of parliamentary activity, he confirmed there is a criterion for gender sensitive budgeting which looks at whether this exists and how it is organised. He also shared an anecdote from the IPU Assembly, in which an MP from the Maldives described a project in their parliament on making a gender responsive budget which entailed additional training for MPs on reading the budget through a gender lens. So, yes, this issue is covered by the indicators.

Kareen Jabre, responding to Bahrain, said this information on Bahrain going paperless is exactly the type of information they are interested to learn about. The IPU also want to hear about the strategy, the metrics of success and details of implementation for this policy. Throughout the year, there will be 4 webinars on this topic. At the main hall there is a stand on the campaign to measure your carbon footprint, it is personal, and an impressive bit of equipment.

Mr Najib El Khadi noted the ASGP's constant commitment to work closely with the IPU, which is important for modernisation and opening new avenues for modern parliaments. He reminded colleagues that there would be a debate tomorrow on gender inequality in parliament and noted that this theme had generated a great deal of interest from the Association with a great many communications submitted on the theme.

Theme: Participation of citizens in the work of Parliament

3. Communication by Ms Barbara Dithapo, Clerk of the National Assembly, Botswana on 'Participation of citizens'

Ms Barbara Dithapo, Clerk of the National Assembly, spoke as follows:

In fulfilling the functions of lawmaking and oversight, a parliament represents those that elected them to parliament. For a parliament to maintain legitimacy, it is critical that accountability to voters should take place systematically throughout the parliamentary term, rather than just at election time. It is important that the people should have ample opportunities to provide feedback on the work of the parliament and of individual parliamentarians. (Parliament's Role in Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: A Parliamentary Handbook, 2019)

The notion therefore that Parliament can be thought of as a public space where the public can engage with their elected representatives and participate in governance and decision-making processes that affect them is fundamental to participatory democracy. According to the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, participatory democracy needs to be entrenched in representative institutions. Concretely for Parliaments, that means creating spaces for citizens and civil society organizations to voice their opinions.

Public engagement strengthens parliamentary representation and contributes to better laws and policies. In addition, it helps to ensure the involvement of the public, good governance and accountability by government to the citizens. It promises the progression from a simple representative democracy, where the citizens merely participate in electing their representatives during the elections, to a participatory democracy in which the citizenry are active and involved in decision-making on an ongoing basis. An active citizenry will invariably lead to a more open, dynamic and robust democracy.

Access to parliament by the citizens is imperative in a democracy. This is particularly important in facilitating public participation which in large involves:

- Providing information to help people understand issues, opportunities or problems, and alternative solutions
- Obtaining public input on matters being considered by Parliament;
- Considering the public's input when making decisions... consulting with the public in the design or decision-making process, including to identify alternatives or preferred solutions.

For effective representation, Members of Parliament need to engage their constituents in continuing dialogue in order to understand their views and perspectives on issues of national development and policy making. Consequently, MPs should then use the powers vested in their office (i.e. legislating, oversight, budget appropriation,) to give voice to those aspirations and ideas. Members also have the opportunity through parliamentary committees, to use the formal structure of parliament to engage constituents and provide them with direct access to the decision making process within the institution.

PRICIPLES FOR PUBLIC PARTICPATION

- The public should have a say in decisions about actions that could affect its members' lives
- Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision
- Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision-making agencies
- Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision 4
- Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate
- Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way
- Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

According to the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) the public participation spectrum describes the role of the public (or community) in planning and decision-making, and how much influence the community has over planning or decision-making processes. It identifies five levels of public participation (or community engagement). The further to the right on the Spectrum, the more influence the community has over decisions, and each level can be appropriate depending on the context. (IAP2, 2017)

In order to achieve public participation and representation, Parliaments must be equipped with the institutional capacities to facilitate the function of representation. Benchmarks indicate that parliaments have developed outreach programmes with the objective to facilitate the flow of information in and out of parliament. Ultimately, it has become evident that Parliaments have at their disposal a number of avenues to strengthen their representation role and improve public participation, either by way of physical presence in geographic regions through constituency offices or improved telecommunications and outreach activities. Developments in technology have also contributed to the way parliaments engage and involve citizens and Parliaments ought to take advantage of this growth, kore especially given the recent experiences with outbreak of pandemics.

Effective democratic parliaments conduct outreach with citizens on an ongoing basis. A parliament may broadcast its sessions via television or radio, most now have

websites, and publications designed to help include citizens in the policy process. Because citizens cannot know how they are being represented if the parliament is opaque and MPs uncommunicative, transparency has an important bearing on the representative function.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN BOTSWANA PARLIAMENT

Public Participation Model

Botswana Parliament developed a public participation model in 2018 through the assistance of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD). The assistance was provided in terms of a Memorandum of Understanding that was signed between WFD and the National Assembly of Botswana (NAB) to assist the NAB to build an effective and efficient Parliament that is participatory and engaged with the citizens of Botswana.

The public participation model is premised on the understanding that in a democratic setup parliament should act as an effective avenue for opening up parliamentary processes to public involvement. In developing this model, we have referenced and borrowed from the South African model, which we have engaged with and had the opportunity to discuss with our neighbouring colleagues.

Through this model, the National Assembly of Botswana acknowledges that public engagement strengthens parliamentary representation and contributes to better laws and policies. In addition, it helps to ensure the involvement of the public, good governance and accountability by government to the citizens.

Mission, Vision and Values

The Parliament of Botswana is a unicameral legislature composed of the National Assembly (NAB) with the function to make laws, represent the people and exercise oversight over the Executive. It also includes the Ntlo ya Dikgosi which is an advisory body to the NAB. The parliamentary service/administration provides support to Members of Parliament (MP) in order for them to fulfil their legislative, oversight and representative roles. This is done through the provision of procedural advice, administrative support and information services in a transparent and timeous manner.

The institutional mandate to implement public participation is derived from the mission and strategic plan of the NAB. The mission of the Parliament of Botswana articulates clearly that “Parliament exists to make Laws, provide oversight and to promote participatory governance for the Peace, Order and Good Government of Botswana”. It is this mission statement that encapsulates the importance of participatory governance within the democratic dispensation of Botswana. The mission statement thus implies that Parliament is committed to the realisation of the notion of a participatory democracy.

Within its strategic framework (2016-2023), Parliament also commits promoting public engagement and participation to strengthen Parliament and enhance

accountable governance in Botswana. The public participation model for the NAB thus takes into account parliament's role as the representatives of the people and consequently making decisions on their behalf. Given that parliamentary representatives generally go back to their voters each general election, it therefore makes great sense for parliament to remain in touch with the people it represents on an ongoing basis so that it better reflects the interests and wishes of the electorate. The laws that it enacts and the oversight that it carries out will be more reflective of society if it were to engage with and involve the public throughout its term. Public participation therefore requires that there is direct involvement of the public in the work of parliament, and that there is open discussion between the public and their parliamentary representatives and decision-makers.

The purpose of this model is to provide a framework within which the NAB public participation practises can be planned and executed so as to ensure that the public is provided with opportunities to participate, that they are better informed and they are more involved, and ultimately that the work of Parliament better reflects the will of the people. The Public Participation Model further seeks to promote the values of good governance and accountability. The model recognises the right of all people to participate in decision-making processes that impact them. It requires that Parliament recognises the intrinsic value of all people and their ability to enrich the work of Parliament.

The public participation model was therefore developed with the following objectives;

- To increase public awareness of Parliament's legislative, oversight and representative functions.
- To increase the level of understanding of Parliament and its functions
- To increase the level of public participation in the law making, oversight and other functions of Parliament.
- To clearly define public participation within the parliamentary context;
- To detail the roles and responsibilities for key political and administrative role-players for public participation in parliament;
- To identify and detail the mechanisms for public participation in parliament;
- To build partnerships with relevant stakeholders;
- To provide opportunities for public participation;

Public Participation Mechanisms and Tools

Parliament of Botswana has adopted several public participation mechanisms and tools to achieve its public participation objectives. These mechanisms constitute a dynamic list of programmes from which the appropriate mechanism is selected for a particular situation or to achieve a particular outcome. Two case studies will be presented below;

Case Study 1 - Monitoring Service Delivery

The Community Scorecard

The Community Score Card (CSC) is a participatory, community based monitoring and evaluation tool that enables citizens to assess the quality of public services and

interact with services providers to express their concerns. It is a community based monitoring tool that is a hybrid of the techniques of social audit, community monitoring and citizen report cards. The CSC is an instrument used to extract social and public accountability and responsiveness from service providers. It is used to inform community members about available services and their entitlements and to solicit their opinions about the accessibility and quality of these services. By providing an opportunity for direct dialogue between service providers and the community, the CSC process empowers the public to voice their opinion and demand improved service delivery.

The ultimate goal of the CSC is to influence the quality, efficiency and accountability with which services are provided. A scorecard approach provides;

1. Community members with the ability to provide feedback directly to the service providers
2. A vehicle for systematically sharing feedback in a transparent and structured manner that enables action and accountability
3. Service providers and administrators with a direct link to their community
4. An opportunity to collect information that can be used by service providers to improve health care services in an informed manner that directly responds to their constituency

Community Score Cards are a power lever for change as they provide a vehicle through which communities and service providers can partner to identify and enact positive improvements together. The strength of the CSC tool and process is that it emphasizes immediate response to the scores and joint decision making and action among all stakeholders. Service providers receive immediate feedback in a space that allows for mutual dialogue between community members and providers around the indicators and scores. Similarly, improvement actions are identified together and both groups take responsibility for implementing and monitoring them. By working together, the scorecard seeks to create a collaborative and constructive dynamic between all stakeholders that result in action, accountability, and positive change.

A scorecard approach provides communities and service providers with data which they can use to measure impact over time and use to advocate for measures to improve service delivery from governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders.

The National Assembly of Botswana rolled out this initiative in 7 of the 12 Districts from June to July, 2022, through five Portfolio Committees of; Health, HIV & AIDS; Education and Skills Development; Finance, Trade and Economic Development; Agriculture, Lands and Housing; and Local Governance and Social Welfare.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective is for Parliament through identified oversight committees, to conduct a participatory monitoring and evaluation process that puts ownership and responsibility for delivery of services in the hands of both the Government and the service recipients. Through scorecards developed around identified sectors and services, communities and implementing Departments remain in touch with

progress made throughout the programme delivery cycle and are able to respond timely to bottlenecks.

Parliament further seeks;

- To improve accountability as relating to the implementation of the Economic Recovery and Transformation Plan and delivery on the existing transformation policies in Botswana, in a bid to take Botswana to high income status by 2036.
- Improvement of service delivery
- Improvement of monitoring and evaluation
- Consensus building and public confidence on Government
- To promote participatory democracy

The rollout of the CSC was successfully implemented, with scorecards developed in various communities across the country for monitoring of service delivery. Monitoring Committees were also established from amongst participating communities, with the responsibility of tracking progress, reevaluating timelines and escalating issues to the offices of the area Members of Parliament. The Offices of the area Members of Parliament are therefore a critical stakeholder within the entire process, being responsible for escalating matters for further resolution. The five Portfolio Committees involved, also prepared their reports on the findings relating to the various sectors for adoption and follow up by Parliament.

Case Study 2 - Leveraging ICTs

Botswana Speaks – Digital Kgotla Botswana, has been lauded as a shining beacon for Democracy in Africa, through her adherence to the Rule of Law, peace and stability. Since independence in 1966, Botswana has held free and fair elections. The country's rich history, culture, and sound institutions have greatly influenced its successful milestones which have translated in to economic development.

Consultation or Therisanyo as it is widely understood has for centuries and beyond played a vital role in the everyday undertakings of every unit of society in Botswana. This extends from the family unit to the highest being the Nation. Consultation is a custom globally, done so as to ensure smooth facilitation of change, developments, multi-lateral and bilateral agreements to be put in to effect. Therefore, Botswana place great importance and respect on Morero, which is when consultations take effect.

The Kgotla remains the platform and place where communities converge for consultations as is the tradition of the land. This is the cornerstone of Botswana's democracy where the principles of freedom of speech, participation or mmualebe in Setswana have been enshrined from time immemorial. These tenets have permeated and influenced Botswana's 12 transition into a multi-party democracy, where consultations continue to form the basis for National Development planning, community and Nation building.

Seeking to improve on this tried and tested method of facilitating dialogue between citizens and leadership, it was found that Information and Communication

Technologies (ICT) can be used to enhance citizen participation on policy dialogue and further strengthen democracy in Botswana, hence the birth of Botswana Speaks.

Botswana Speaks is a parliamentary initiative aimed at enhancing democracy through public participation and policy dialogue. It is about enhancing the representative role of the Member of Parliament and building a responsive Parliament and Government for improved service delivery.

Botswana Speaks was successfully piloted in the four constituencies of Nata/Gweta, Maun West, Boteti North, and South East from April 2013 to March 2014. The Botswana Speaks Project pilot phase was a partnership project between the Parliament of Botswana, eGovlab (University of Stockholm), Gov2u (Non-Governmental Organisation based in Sweden) and the Swedish Trade Council.

Following the successful piloting, the Pilot phase report was adopted by the 10th parliament and recommended for a rollout to all constituencies during NDP 11. Botswana Speaks is therefore about Voice and leaving nobody behind while enhancing and bridging the gap between our traditional consultation systems (Kgotla meetings) leveraging on new technologies.

Botswana Speaks uses a platform (case management system), which is webbased (a mobile application will follow), will allow citizens to send messages directly via an online system using computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones. The messages are uploaded automatically into a tracker, and viewed regularly by the members of Parliament for response. It has two components built in;

uSpeak-for constituents to submit issues, opinions pertaining to their constituency. uSpeak will also enable constituents to be in touch with their MP's and or request information from them.

Speak4Yourself -enables constituents to discuss, vote on (polls), make their position known about issues and legislation before Parliament. This will empower constituents to have more of a say and role with regard to policy making and motions tabled by their respective MP's at Parliament.

The Need for Botswana Speaks

A key observation is that beyond voting there is currently limited contact between constituents and their representatives. This can be due to a host of reasons like the vastness of the country as well as limited time of MP's to be in their respective constituencies and being able to actively engage with their constituents. Botswana Speaks will revolutionise the way MPs, Parliament and Government interact with citizens.

What Botswana Speaks will do

- Increase citizen participation in the democratic process
- Improve communication between elected representatives and citizens
- Reduce digital divide between rural and urban communities
- Harness opportunities presented by the more than 100% mobile penetration in Botswana

- Increase uptake and use of Information Communication Technologies (ICT's) in Botswana.

The power to communicate with your MP 24/7, 365

The platform enables constituents to communicate with their MP's 24/7, 365 and effectively capture and relay their suggestions and opinions on issues relating to service delivery and policy making amongst others all at the click of a button on your computer or any smart or mobile device.

Botswana Speaks is FREE

Use of the Botswana Speaks platform is very simple and access is made easy whether you are at home or in the office. For citizens without access to internet, Botswana Speaks is accessible free of charge at the constituency offices where there are dedicated Botswana Speaks officers to assist the public whether it's with registration or using the platform.

SMS based platform

For those that do not have access to internet or do not have a smart device but have a GSM phone, Botswana Speaks is still accessible via sms platform. For one to access the platform there is firstly a need to register either online or with assistance by the local Parliament constituency office.

Botswana Speaks Constituency Officers

Each of the 57 Parliament constituency offices across Botswana has a dedicated Botswana Speaks officer based at each office. The officers are extensively trained on Parliament functions and on using the Botswana Speaks platform and are ready to address any queries should they arise and ensure that every Botswana has access to the platform irrespective of their age, gender, religion and or political affiliation.

The programme is also now integrated into other national ICT programmes most especially the village connectivity programme which seeks to connect all villages to broadband internet connection. Access to internet in public areas free of charge also enables connectivity to Botswana Speaks through the Smart Botswana initiative of availing Government services online. In that regard it is very evident that even at Executive level, public access and meaningful remains a priority as a catalyst for national development.

Make your voice heard! Botswana Speaks strengthens citizens' voices and at the same time assists elected officials become more efficient and lead transparent institutions by:

- Offering citizens and civil society the opportunity to participate individually and collectively in a highly democratic process, keeping their security and privacy uncompromised.
- Bringing the optimum of new technologies and best practices to serve the society and keep everyone up to date with what is currently trending in this ever-changing field.

As Parliament of Botswana, we strive for the progression from a simple representative democracy, where the citizens don't just merely participate in electing

their representatives during the elections, to a participatory democracy in which the citizenry are active and involved in decision-making on an ongoing basis.

An active citizenry will lead to a more open, dynamic and robust democracy as well as ensure that Parliament is perceived as a public space where the public can engage with their elected representatives and participate in governance and decision-making processes that affect them.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluating public participation will therefore, allow parliament to not only learn about the implementation of programmes and using that knowledge to make decisions about them, but to set goals and design effective programmes, adapt them to changing circumstances, and improve them along the way. The Monitoring and evaluating of these initiatives under the public participation model will involve inter alia the following:

- Developing and implementing a monitoring and evaluation tool
- All public participation concept documents and project plans must be provided to the Public Participation Team/Committee prior to implementation;
- Regular update reports must be compiled and considered at meetings of the Public Participation Team/Committee;
- The Public Participation Team must meet regularly to receive reports and updates on the various public participation activities taking place. A set day once a week or fortnightly may be considered.
- Developing and implementing Reporting mechanism
- Tabling and publication of reports
- Implementing a feedback mechanism • How feedback must be given. Written, public gathering, publication in print, radio, television, etc

Conclusions

At its core, what distinguishes a democratic parliament from other branches of government is that its members are elected by and directly represent the citizens of a country. Much literature has been developed on the law-making and oversight functions of a parliament and an MP, but the role of the MP in the constituency has gone virtually unnoticed. Public participation should not be considered as an add-on to any of the parliamentary processes. It is imperative that public participation be integrated into the processes and systems of Parliament and across the various organisational components. For example, the mainstreaming of public participation across all Committees will ensure that the public will be involved in law-making and oversight functions of Parliament.

It is this dialogue that is so important to the work of an MP and the parliament. Citizens must be provided with access to information about what is happening in the parliament and the positions being taken by their MP. In return, citizens must have venues for providing their opinions and inputs into the work of the parliament. In a functioning democracy citizens have knowledge and opinions about various draft laws under consideration. They also have access to information about how the

government is implementing laws and spending their tax monies. This information must be used to ensure proper oversight of the Executive branch of government.



Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked the member for their presentation and invited Mr Ahmed Mohammed Al Nadabi, Secretary General of the Shura Council of Oman, to present. As he was not present in the room, the President announced the postponement of the paper until the next session of the ASGP. He invited Mr Kennedy Mugove Chokuda, Clerk of Parliament of Zimbabwe to take the floor.

4. Communication by Mr Kennedy Mugove Chokuda, Clerk of Parliament of Zimbabwe, on ‘Participation of Citizens - A Case of the Parliament of Zimbabwe’

Mr Kennedy Mugove Chokuda, Clerk of Parliament of Zimbabwe, spoke as follows:

Esteemed Colleagues;

May I begin my brief remarks by extending my deepest commendations to the Inter-Parliamentary Union for the successful hosting of this critical meeting of the Secretary General’s from various national Parliaments. I will preface therefore, my remarks by quoting Ben-Zeev and Waterhouse (2012), who observed, and I believe, rightly so that “A ‘People’s Parliament’ requires an institution that prioritises and seeks active engagement with the public, and that is receptive and responsive to the needs of the people.” This laudable statement forms the import of my communication, which quintessentially speaks to how the Parliament of Zimbabwe has moved towards enhancing the participation of citizens in the work of Parliament.

Reflective of the infectious aspiration espoused by Ben-Zeev and Waterhouse (2012), the Constitution of Zimbabwe gives credence to the participation of citizens in Parliament. Section 141 of the Constitution read together with Standing Order 191 is emphatic in its declaration that “Parliament must facilitate public involvement in its legislative and other processes and in the processes of its Committees.” Dove-tailing Section 141, Section 149 of the Constitution read together with Standing Order 195 accords every citizen and permanent resident of Zimbabwe, the right to petition Parliament to consider any matter within its authority, including the enactment, amendment or repeal of any legislation. Additionally, these cardinal provisions are reinforced in our Parliament’s Institutional Strategic Plan (2018-2023), which

unequivocally articulates the modus operandi towards the attainment of the Constitutional mandate of “*protecting the Constitution and promoting democratic governance in Zimbabwe.*”

It is therefore axiomatic that the robust Constitutional and other provisions are only as effective only when they are implemented. To that end, the Parliament of Zimbabwe adopted a three pronged model, which acts a conduit through which public participation in Parliament can be enhanced. The model is anchored on three key pillars of Information and Education, Consultation and Involvement as well as Feedback.

Under the Information and Education pillar, our Parliament cast its gaze towards enhancing access to information, which we believe is the cornerstone for effective citizen participation in Parliament. Through the Speaker’s Outreach Program, which has largely targeted higher and tertiary education institutions in Zimbabwe, Parliament of Zimbabwe has managed to establish linkages between the legislature and the academia which laid the foundation for evidence-informed policy making. Further, over the past few years, our Parliament has taken steps to adequately capacitate the Public Relations Department, the hub of information dissemination in Parliament. Moreover, observing that the modern environment is inundated with misinformation and disinformation including misconceptions about the operations of Parliament, our Parliament embarked on the development of a robust Communication Strategy and Language Policy. The Communication strategy establishes an efficient and effective communication infrastructure with both internal and external stakeholders, including citizens, which is critical to meeting our constitutional obligations. The Language Policy, on the other hand, envisages that all the sixteen (16) recognised languages in Zimbabwe are utilised in the dissemination of information. It is hoped that this strategy will be of importance in countering fake news and disinformation while simultaneously enhancing the effective and efficient participation of the citizens in Parliament. The Parliament of Zimbabwe has taken it upon itself to inform the general public on the petition's procedure in response to the common realisation that petitions submitted before Parliament were generally inadmissible mostly due to technicalities. In this regard, a petition procedure has been

developed, and the legal services has set up a booth at every exhibition to inform the public about the petition processes.

Additionally, the vibrant Research Department has been critical in the production of content and research products such as policy briefs, analysis of budget statements, bills, protocols and agreements – all of which work to educate the citizens and assist them to effectively participate in the activities of Parliament and its Committees. To add on, Parliament of Zimbabwe has increasingly participated in various exhibition shows such as the Zimbabwe Agricultural Show (ZAS), the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF) and other provincial exhibition shows. These platforms have been used to spread information about Parliament, which, in the grand scheme will enhance citizen participation. Parliament of Zimbabwe, through the Public Relations Department has hosted various schools and organisations and has given them a tour of the Parliament Building as a way of opening Parliament to the citizens.

A robust interactive website has been critical in disseminating information to the public. Significant investments have been made over the years to ensure that Members and the general public have access to sufficient and timely content. Participation and regular content updates on various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have proven to be very effective in increasing our reach and providing citizens with relevant and accurate information. The COVID requirements taught us to think outside the box, which led to investments in these platforms. Turning to the Consultation and Involvement pillar, which is primarily anchored on Section 141 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and Standing Order 191, Parliament of Zimbabwe has formulated and implemented a raft of interventions. Among these includes the use of public hearings for bills, petitions and other issues national interest. More so, bearing in mind that the world has gone digital and necessitated by the exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic, our Parliament has also adopted virtual public hearings which are carried out through the Zoom platform. The hearings have also been taken to the radio stations as a way of widening the reach especially for people in the hard-to-reach areas. Additionally, Members of Parliament, as the elected representatives of the people have increasingly utilised the question time platform during the Wednesday Parliament plenary sessions to highlight issues of importance in their respective

constituencies. Through motions, Members of Parliament have been vociferous in playing their representative role by speaking to issues of national interest – issues which are reflective of the collective voices of the people of Zimbabwe. Our Parliament has also sought to promote health lifestyle through the establishment of the Zimbabwe Parliamentary Sports Club – a club in which Members of Parliament use sports to spread awareness while also promoting health lifestyles in their constituencies.

The Feedback pillar essentially completes the cycle of effective participation in the work of the Parliament of Zimbabwe. Through the various social media platforms, Parliament of Zimbabwe has managed to effectively disseminate information and get real-time feedback from the Citizens. The Citizens' Budget, an abridged version of the National Budget is developed and distributed to constituencies annually as an avenue to simplify the budget as well as provide feedback on the outcomes from the pre-budget consultations. The next addition of the citizen's budget will include sections written in each of the 16 recognised languages in addition to infographics. As a consequence of national budget consultations, the Committee on Budget and Finance has plans to hold feedback meetings with each of the 10 provinces of the nation to inform them of the recommendations incorporated in the current budget. The weekly Parliament sittings are also broadcasted through the Facebook Live platform to allow citizens to have real-time engagement with the Parliament sittings. Other private media outlets and organisations that provide live broadcasts of Parliament sittings are permitted to record and broadcast chamber and committee sessions. Furthermore, the Question-and-Answer session held every Wednesday in the National Assembly and Thursday in the Senate allows Members to seek clarification from the Executive on issues of national importance on behalf of the public. Furthermore, Parliament has opened toll-free lines through which citizens can provide feedback pertaining to any issues of interest which fall within the jurisdiction of Parliament. To add on, Parliament constantly carries out stakeholder satisfaction surveys which provide invaluable feedback on the performance of Parliament.

Distinguished Colleagues, The use of the aforementioned tactics has not been without its challenges. Our efforts to properly involve the public in our processes and procedures are nevertheless hindered by resource limitations. To enable the successful

implementation of these initiatives, both human and financial resources are important. Our Twitter handle was hacked twice in 2022 as a result of our frequent use of social media tools, making them vulnerable to cyberattacks. Also, as we extended our participation in the social media sphere, misinformation, and disinformation activities against our content intensified. Without appropriate countermeasures, misinformation and disinformation have a high potential to undermine efforts made to engage the public. Additionally, while we urged our Presiding Officers and Members to use social media as a way to interact with the public, we learned that this endeavor had a cost as fraudulent accounts were quickly formed. Unexpectedly, some of the fake accounts have been publishing helpful content. However, the need to maintain the credibility of the institution and to ensure that only authorised content is made available to the public demands that we take control and own the distribution channels at our disposal. Moving ahead, preparations are being made to hire a specialised officer to handle cyber threats. We have also enlisted the aid of our legal staff in relation to inadmissible petitions in order to provide details on the expected format and content.

Esteemed Colleagues, I will conclude my communication by pointing out that it is pertinent that we purposely pursue the ideals of opening up our institutions to the effective participation of citizens. Pursuant to that, our foregoing encouragement therefore should be that we continuously explore innovative ways to tear down the walls of citizen apathy in the work of Parliaments – walls beyond which the infinite vistas of an accessible, responsive, people-driven and inclusive Parliament await.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked the member for their presentation.

5. Communication by Dr Remco Nehmelman, Secretary General of the Senate of the Netherlands on ‘Engaging citizens’

Dr Remco Nehmelman, Secretary General of the Senate of the Netherlands, spoke as follows:

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, First of all, I would like to emphasize that it is a great pleasure for me to be here. As always, it is a wonderful and inspiring experience to meet so many colleagues from all over the world. Also, I would like to

extend my gratitude to our Bahraini hosts and the ASGP secretariat for organizing this conference in an excellent way.

Colleagues, I believe the topic at hand is not new – although it has become somewhat of a hot topic in recent years. Participation of citizens has been at the heart of our democracies since the words *demos* and *kratos* were first used by the ancient Greeks. You only have to look at the word, meaning ‘people rule’, to realize that our democracies are built on participation by citizens. Without them there would be no democracy. Though this may seem a simplification of reality, I do think it is necessary that we realize this before we continue our exchange of views on the topic. Of course, we are now dealing with representative democracies, in which our parliaments are elected by the people. With that mandate, parliamentarians can go forward with their work. In recent years, we – in the Netherlands – have seen that voter turnout has declined and more and more people have started to express that they do not feel represented by their elected representatives, on all levels: local, regional, national and European.

In my country, as in others, this has led to many initiatives in the past ten to fifteen years, in order to engage citizens in other ways than through elections. Also, a so-called State Committee that advises the Dutch government on all sorts of subjects, has advised to explore the direct participation of citizens in democracy, for instance through a corrective referendum. Although I feel that change is needed in order to increase citizens engagement, I do doubt whether systems like lotteries, referendums and citizen panels are the right answer.

First of all, the believe that direct participation is a panacea is wrong. Citizens engagement is not always the right answer to political fragmentation for instance. I am especially hesitant when the means – that is citizens engagement – seems to be more important than the subject. I do feel that this is the case in many initiatives. And often it is not well prepared. Before you consider any of all possibilities, you need to determine whether you want citizens engagement to for instance improve your policies, to increase the sense of responsibility of citizens or to create support for a certain decision. The example of Ireland, where a Citizens Assembly of 99 citizens and an independent chairperson has been asked by the Irish government to advise on the issues of abortion, climate and aging, seems like a success. But still, this Assembly was formed by the government with no involvement of parliament. In the Netherlands we have had some experience with referendums, but these were never full-fledged referendums, but so-called consultative referendums. And more often than not, the results were discarded by the government. Which again led to more people losing their faith in their representatives. A vicious circle.

A topic that I do feel is worthwhile exploring is the call for lowering voting age. In the Netherlands the voting age is 18, and many believe that by changing it to 16 will benefit the involvement of people, and the youth especially. Also, young people have a different perspective on issues such as climate change and migration. Perspectives that are not taken into account at the moment, at least when it comes to voter participation on which our parliament is based. Although there are official advisory reports to the Dutch government to lower the age to 16, the government has thus far rejected these proposals, because on the one hand it means constitutional change, a

thorough process which cannot be undertaken lightly, and on the other hand it is suggested by the government that the brains of young people are not fully grown and ready to assume such a responsibility. I know that several countries have lowered the voting age in recent years, and I look forward to hearing from you what your experiences are. And, whether this had had a positive effect on voter turnout and citizens, especially young citizens, engagement.

Colleagues, As you can tell, I am hesitant. Hesitant, whether citizens engagement is the only way forward. Hesitant whether participation projects are the solution to citizens unrest and political fragmentation, and hesitant because of what this will mean for our parliaments. What is parliaments' role in the call for new democracy? Is citizens participation the future of our parliamentary democracy? And if yes, how can we best organize this with respect for parliamentary democracy? These are my questions to you this afternoon. I for one do not yet have the answers, and I look forward to our discussions. Thank you.



Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked the member for their presentation. He announced a short coffee break, after which there would be questions from the floor.

Mr Sumariyandono SOEDOMO (Indonesia) said it is imperative that Parliament, as representative of the people, enables public participation in the legislative process and that this must be guaranteed by law. For the House of Representatives of Indonesia, this is crucial because law must be based on interests of the people as the results of laws affect the people.

Engagement is also important for civil society organisations, such as NGOs, academics and the media. In Indonesia, MPs also facilitate public participation through the 'house of aspiration' project, a means for the public to express their aspiration to be responded to by MPs. MPs must also be accountable to the public so the public can assess their performance. The public can follow the role and responsibilities of the MPs and the House also facilitates participation through public hearings, in writing or in person. The public can also communicate through special social media channels, where they contact MPs directly. This is becoming an increasingly sophisticated and quick engagement process to input voices of the public into parliament.

Mr Said MOKADEM, Maghreb Consultative Council, commented that the initiatives that are being adopted by parliaments are very impressive. He said we may wonder why parliaments are so keen to include citizens, specifically on budgets and the environment, which could be directly related to the declining role of parliaments and the rise of civil society as a new initiative making authority. This highlights the importance of moving closer to direct forms of democracy. Another important question is why we don't hear much about parliamentary oppositions exposing the shortcomings of parliaments. Parliaments today receive most bills from the Government, new initiative seldom come from the opposition, parliamentary committees are almost closed to all participation from active civic society. It is true

that citizens participation in the legislative process is both new and old but today the insistence on parliaments to listed is louder.

Mr Mahmoud Etman (Egypt) said that in Egypt fundamental laws are always submitted for debate to allow all civic society to have input. They also conduct research on aspects of the constitution, for example on the matter of demographic development where there is a problem in Egypt (increasing 2 million in a year) and a resulting study was referred to the President. Furthermore, a committee has been established to work on research to take specific case studies from civic society and to get an opinion from the public.

Mr Naim ÇOBAN (Türkiye) commented that where petitions are taken into consideration in the law-making process, the fundamental issue to keep in mind is the need for a solid infrastructure for the methodology. If many citizens apply at the same time, you must have a robust system to take all ideas into consideration, ensuring the diversity of ideas is necessary. He further stated that other channels than social media should also be provided to collect feedback from the people. Each channel has its own limitations.

Barbara Dithapo (Botswana) responding to the last presenter, who asked us to consider other avenues of participation than social media, agreed this is very important.

Mr Kennedy Mugove Chokuda (Zimbabwe) also agreed with Turkey on the necessity for other platforms, social media having limited use, especially for rural communities. It is necessary to find other ways to engage with people in the hinterland, there is a need to use radio in Zimbabwe as everyone has access to this technology, you have to ensure engagement reaches the rich and poor and create varied platforms for all citizens. Perhaps the reason why it is becoming fashionable is because of the demands coming from citizens, as an institution you cannot afford to fail to act when citizens demand action. Members of parliament have very high aspirations for what we can achieve, but after they arrive in Parliament they become frustrated by obstacles in the system. The reality is that there is very limited ability for parliament to make change and pass votes. The rise of civic society organisation is also an important factor.

Dr Remco Nehmelman (Netherlands) commented that he was perhaps conservative about citizen participation, asking himself who are we engaging with, why this group. MPs are chosen carefully by the electoral system and you have to be careful it is not always the same citizens in the groups engaging and they are not reflective of the wider society. On lowering the voting age to 16, he said his daughters are 17 and 19 but were very well-informed on politics at 16. The problems with housing, studying and climate change are issues that need young people's voices, we often talk about them rather than letting them speak.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President thanked members for their contribution and announced a coffee break.

The session recommenced at 4.25pm

6. Communication by Ms Sarah Davies, Clerk Assistant, House of Commons, UK, ‘Petitioning in the UK House of Commons: a history and an e-revolution’

Ms Sarah Davies, Clerk Assistant, House of Commons, spoke as follows:

Petitioning in the UK House of Commons: a history and an e-revolution
Petitioning has been part of the UK Parliament for hundreds of years. There are records of petitions from the fourteenth century, while the right of the public to petition was agreed by the Commons by resolution in 1669.

In the 19th century the Chartists presented a petition with 3.5 million signatures; the signature sheets had to be hand sewn together to create a single roll of paper that weighed over 300kg. It was carried in a large decorated box to Parliament by relays of building workers through London, along with a procession of music and flags, attracting huge crowds who watched it be delivered. When entering the House of Commons it was so big that it got stuck trying to get through the House of Commons door. After attempts to dismantle the doorframe failed, the petition was disassembled and the sheets heaped onto the floor of the House. Here they towered above the clerks' table on which, in theory, the petition was supposed to be laid.

E-petitions

In 2006 the Government started its own e-petitions site, where the public could submit their petitions electronically and gather signatures online. These e-petitions, however, were not connected to Parliamentary procedure or process. In 2007 the Procedure Committee in the House of Commons recommended that Parliament should be the primary recipient of petitions from the public and said that e-petitions had the potential to connect the public more effectively with Parliament. In 2014 the House of Commons agreed to establish a new e-petitions site, jointly owned by the House and 10 Downing Street, which would be overseen by a new House of Commons Select Committee: the Petitions Committee.

E-petitions and the work of the Petitions Committee

In 2022 there were 6.7 million signatures added to petitions, 2,360 petitions were opened, and the committee did extra public engagement with just under 40,000 people to inform petition debates. Since the start of the Parliament (from February 2020 to present) just under 800 petitions have received a response from the Government and over 150 petitions have been debated.

Any UK resident or citizen can start and sign petitions on petition.parliament.uk. The sole requirement is provision of an email address – there is no age limit; the system is built on trust, although there are systems in place to help prevent fraud. The House of Commons (through the Petitions Committee) and the Government agree rules for acceptable petitions. In short, petitions must express a clear request for the House of Commons or Government about something which is within their responsibility. They must not:

- Call for someone to be given or lose an honour or a job (i.e sack the prime minister or give X a knighthood)
- Be a duplicate of another open petition (this splits support for an issue);
- Be offensive, extreme, libellous, a joke or refer to active legal proceedings

Full rules are available, in plain English, on the Committee's website.⁴ The Petitions Committee staff team are responsible for moderating petitions according to the rules. When a petition is rejected, petitioners are told why and given advice on next steps – such as redrafting or signing an existing petition.

In 2022, 2,360 petitions were permitted and 8,039 were rejected. The most common reason for rejecting (40%) a petition was that it related to a matter on which there was already an active petition. 18% were rejected because they did not relate to Government's or Parliament's responsibilities; and 13% did not ask for a clear action. There is a popular Twitter feed listing the subjects of rejected petitions (<https://twitter.com/rejectpetitions>).

The team aim to check petitions within 7 days. This is subject to resource constraints. Following the 2016 referendum on EU membership, over 8,000 petitions were received in a matter of days. Following the announcement of the first Covid-19 lockdown, over 3,000 were received a single week. This took careful engagement to manage petitioners' expectations.

How e-petitions relate to the Petitions Committee

The Petitions Committee has all the same powers as a standard House of Commons departmental Committee. It can also refer petitions to other Committees, and link relevant petitions to items on the Commons Order paper.

Uniquely, the Committee also has the power to schedule debates on petitions in Westminster Hall, the House's second debating Chamber.⁶ These are on neutral motions. Petitions receiving more than 100,000 signatures are automatically considered by the Committee for a debate, but petitions with fewer signatures can be debated too. These are often among the most watched or read debates in Parliament.

Public engagement and petitions The Petitions Committee has dedicated public engagement staff, to ensure petitioners and others are directly involved in the work of the Committee. Its priorities are to reach audiences that research has found tend to be less engaged with Parliamentary debate:⁷

- Disabled people;
- People who are in lower socio-economic groups: the long term unemployed and unskilled workers;
- People from minority ethnic groups;
- Women;
- Young people

Inquiry work

The Committee inquired in 2015 into support and funding for treatment of brain tumours. Following an initial Government response to a petition on the subject, which the Committee felt insufficient, the Committee launched an inquiry. It

received over 1,000 personal submissions and held events to meet with contributors. It produced a report based heavily on this personal testimony, ahead of a debate in Westminster Hall. As a result of the combination of engagement and proceedings, the Government agreed to establish a working group on the subject, which included a representative of the petitioners. In the longer term, this led to an increase in funding for brain tumour treatment, and an improved mechanism for allocating funding to research.

Bringing in new voices to an existing debate

Another example of using petitions to bring in different voices to existing debates can be seen in the Petitions Committee's work on online abuse. The Committee received a petition from a well-known mother of a disabled child who received abuse online. The issue of online abuse was very much already on the parliamentary agenda but the Committee took the view that the specific experiences of disabled people were not being considered. It launched an inquiry focussed on hearing the experiences of disabled people, published initial recommendations and consulted on them and held workshops with disabled people asking them what they thought about its draft recommendations and refined them according to the feedback received. The Government committed to consulting with disabled people specifically on its work in this area.

Changing the conversation

The Petitions Committee's engagement has also changed the way in which issues are debated in Parliament. For example, it received a petition (started and signed by a large number of young people) about reducing the school week so that children didn't have to go to school on a Friday. This petition could have been dismissed as children being 'lazy' and just wanting more time off. However, after sending a survey to everyone who signed the petition, the public engagement highlighted the serious 6 Standing Order No. 145A(7) 7 Political disengagement in the UK: who is disengaged? - House of Commons Library (parliament.uk) reasons behind it: the mental health of school children, children wanting more time to spend with families; and wanting more time to do extracurricular activities such as sport or other creative interests that they had. The summary of the survey was sent to all MPs and the Minister who responded to the debate.

Petitions and participation in wider House of Commons proceedings

10% of petitions reach the threshold to receive a government response or be considered for a debate in Parliament. That means that 90% of petitions potentially receive no feedback. To keep these petitioners engaged, the Committee team track upcoming House of Commons business and pass relevant information to petitioners. They will also inform MPs where there is a petition relevant to Parliamentary business in their name.

The Petitions Committee Team work closely with the Chamber Engagement Team (CET). CET look at upcoming debates to identify ones which are appropriate for them to conduct a public engagement exercise to help inform the debate. They first approach the MP(s) who are leading the debate and if they are content, the Team design an engagement activity, usually in the form of a survey which is then sent to people who have signed relevant petitions and people who have signed up to receive

Parliament newsletters. A powerful example was a debate on a very tragic issue: sudden unexplained death in childhood. The related petition was started by a bereaved mother and called for more support for parents who find themselves in her situation. With just over 500 signatures, the petition was not going to receive a government response or its own petition debate. However, the Chamber Engagement and Petitions Teams were able to email those who had signed the petition with an opportunity to share their experiences to inform the debate. People shared their very personal experiences and views on the support, such as mental health support, that they felt was needed for parents. These were shared by the MP leading the debate and he used them to pull out the common themes to inform the debate.

The Petitions Committee Team also work closely with their colleagues on other House Select Committees. They help to promote other Committee work on issues and give those Committees access to people with lived experience or interest on a certain topic. Given the large numbers of signatories the petitions can have, promoting an open inquiry could potentially be difficult to handle with Committee Teams concerned about receiving thousands of pieces of written evidence. However, the Petitions Team will work with them to find an effective way for them to be able to engage with petitioners, for example through a survey or through facilitating meetings between petition creators and the Select Committee. On 9 February a disabled petitioner who had started a petition on financial support for disabled people, gave oral evidence to the Women and Equalities Committee who were looking into this issue.

Summary

Noting their long history as a Parliamentary proceeding, the introduction to the petitioning system of an 'e-petition' model and the creation of the Petitions Committee has improved the ability of the public to engage meaningfully with Parliamentary procedure. Linking petitioners to wider Parliamentary activity – whether debates in Westminster Hall, Committee inquiries, or direction to other relevant business – has also improved the ability of the House of Commons Service to identify relevant audiences for business within the House and increase wider public understanding of the House's work.



Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked the member for their presentation.

7. Communication by Mr Kwang-jae Lee, Secretary General of Korean National Assembly, on 'Political participation of Citizens through Big Data Platform and AI Technology'

Mr Kwang-jae Lee, Secretary General of Korean National Assembly, spoke as follows:

Honorable Delegates,

I am Lee Kwang-jae, Secretary General of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea. It is my great honor to meet you all here in Manama, Bahrain.

The development of information and communication technology and AI is triggering great changes in the way people participate in politics. With data integration and real time processing, as well as smoother interactive communication, citizens are now directly involved in the policy process. Technology is compensating for the limitations of the existing representative system caused by information asymmetry and one-way communication.

Honorable delegates, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce various efforts of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea to improve people's participation in politics using technology. First, we are building a 「National Strategy and Policy Big Data Platform」. The “National Strategy and Policy Big Data Platform” is a data platform that integrates important policy data for the country and its people and converts it for machine learning. We aim to create new values through data integration, establish reasonable policy agenda, and identify potential policy demands.

We are also planning collaboration with the government, public institutions and the private sector in this process. It will allow the National Assembly to come up with high quality policies through data integration and sharing and to re-establish itself as an institution that solves problems in line with the needs of the people. Let me now introduce the “Policy Seminar Real-time Broadcasting System.”

Considering that policy seminar is one of the main legislative activities of the National Assembly members, we are building a system that relays policy seminars to the public in real time. We are to install digital video recording and sound equipment and monitors in the conference room of the National Assembly Members' Office Building and establish a network so that each member's office can easily record their own policy seminars and transmit them on YouTube. Starting with a small-scale pilot project in 2022, we are in the process of installing new equipment in 13 conference rooms this year.

The introduction of the real-time broadcasting system will not only enhance public access to legislative activities, but also enable two-way communication between the public and the National Assembly members by incorporating interactive communication technologies such as online chatting.

In addition, the preservation of policy seminar videos on a separate web site will make it easy for everyone to find and use them. Lastly, I would like to introduce the 'Live Subtitling System with AI Speech Recognition'. It has been developed and established in accordance with the 「National Assembly Act」, which stipulates measures for smooth provision of information to the disabled. The system is meaningful in that it is the world's first live subtitling service using AI speech recognition for National Assembly meetings.

Based on the latest state-of-the-art AI speech recognition technology, we have upgraded the engine by using language models and acoustic models and made it learn data from the meetings and press conferences of the National Assembly, thereby enhancing accuracy and securing usability. In the future, the National

Assembly of the Republic of Korea will provide subtitle service for broadcasting of all standing committee meetings to improve access to legislative information for those with hearing impairment.

With the digital revolution, the political system is entering a new phase. Changes in the way people participate in politics, led by the development of ICT and AI technologies, are calling for changes in the roles and responsibilities of the National Assembly as well. The National Assembly of the Republic of Korea will continue to lead the way for digital National Assembly and AI National Assembly, reaching out to the public first, seeking solutions together, and fulfilling its role as a representative body of the people. Thank you for your attention.



8. Communication by Mr Philippe Delivet, Director of International Affairs and Protocol, French Senate on 'Participation of citizens'

Mr Philippe Delivet, Director of International Affairs and Protocol, spoke as follows:

Mr. President, General Secretaries,
Dear Colleagues,

The French Constitution of 1958 operates a conciliation between representative and direct democracy. According to the Constitution, « national sovereignty belongs to the people, who exercise it through their representatives and by the path of referendum ».

Thus, it provides for the possibility of asking the people to express their opinion directly by means of referendums in several assumptions:

- It is the rule, in principle, for the adoption of constitutional laws, the consultation of the people taking place in this case after the vote of a draft revision in the same terms by the two chambers (article 89 of the Constitution)
- It is an option open to the President of the Republic for the adoption of laws related to the organisation of public powers, reforms relating to economic, social or environmental policy and to the public services which contributes to them, or the ratification of some treaties (article 11 of the Constitution) ;

The last referendum, known as a legislative referendum, was originally initiated by the President of the Republic alone. Following the constitutional revision of 2008, it can also theoretically be held on the initiative of one fifth of the members of parliament (185 deputies and/ or senators) supported by 1/10 of the voters registered on the electoral roll (approximately 4.7 million voters). If the bill supported by the parliamentarians and voters in the required conditions is not examined by the parliament within the 6-month period, the President of the Republic calls a referendum. So far, this « shared initiative referendum » procedure has never been fully implemented (despite an attempt in 2019 on the privatisation of the Paris airports). More generally, the use of referendums under the Fifth Republic has remained relatively limited. For example, out of the 24 constitutional revision laws

since 1958, only two have been adopted by referendum (both in 1962 and in 2000, concerning the term of office of the President of the Republic), the others by the Congress bringing together the two chambers of Parliament.

Since the beginning of the Fifth Republic, representative democracy has played a full role in the discussion of constitutional revisions as well as in the adoption of legislative texts and the exercise of the essential mission of control of the Executive. In France, these missions are carried out by the National Assembly and the Senate, 3 which together constitute the Parliament. As a full-fledged legislative chamber, the Senate plays a full role and also ensures the representation of local authorities.

Yet, in France as elsewhere, representative democracy is challenged by the new expectations of citizens with regard to public debate. The high abstention rates during elections and the risk of displacement of the public debate outside of Parliament (social networks, street with the « yellow waistcoats » movement) are signs that call for answers. To this end, the Senate has taken several initiatives in recent years to involve citizens more in its work, taking advantage of the new opportunities offered by the internet.

I- Online citizen consultations

Since 2007, online citizen consultations have been offered on the Senate website. They enable committees and delegations to enrich their legislative and monitoring work. These consultations can echo current public policies. For example, at the beginning of the health crisis, the Senate Social Affairs Committee launched a consultation of health professionals on the management of the COVID-19 crisis. 3785 responses were received in a fortnight from various medical professions: doctors, pharmacists, dentists and physiotherapists.

This consultation brought to light the problem of the lack of consideration given to community medicine, as crisis management was focused on the hospital and the effects on the management of other diseases.

Moreover, this tool has made it possible to reach micro-targets: the Economic Affairs Committee, for example, collected 140 testimonies from farmers' relatives within the framework of the mission on the prevention of suicides in agriculture, an unprecedented number on this subject.

Lastly, this instrument provides input for legislative work. The consultation on the « environmental impact of online deliveries » by the Sustainable Development Committee, which tested the idea of a « climate elasticity » of delivery rates, received 2709 responses, mainly from young urban dwellers, which enriched the committee's position on the climate and resilience bill.

II- The consultation platform for local elected representatives

In 2018, a consultation platform for local elected representatives was set up. It is an original tool, specific to the Senate, which aims to consolidate the link of proximity between our institution, representative of local authorities according to the

Constitution, and local elected representatives. The number of them registered to date is 35 970. Since 2018, the Senate has launched 26 consultations, the current 4 consultation about the simplification of norms being the 27th. We count an average of 1648 answers per consultation, with several over counting 3000. The platform is used by the commissions and delegations in the frame of their legislative and control missions. It is a reactive and soft tool, allowing technical and political consultations.

For example, the Law Committee of the Senate used one between the two rounds of the departmental and regional elections of June 2021 to study the issue of electoral propaganda distribution on the French territory. While the Government argued of an improvement of the situation, the 3019 consulted elected representatives expressed an opposite feeling. This consultation highlighted contrary cases (96% of the electors in the Cher department did not get electoral propaganda).

III- A platform for filing online petitions e-petition

In the same time, a deposit platform for online deposits has been launched by the Senate, on January, 23th, 2020. This e-petition initiative aims to revivify the petition right of the assemblies, which is inherited by the French Revolution. The platform allows the citizens to deposit a petition to the Senate and to support an already published one. The petitions can focus on the inscription of a proposed text at the ordre du jour of the Senate or on the creation of a controlling senatorial mission.

To be accepted, they have to respect some specific conditions: being written in French, not being discriminatory or defamatory nor calling for violence. The bill has to concern a legislative modification and must respect the constitution. The claimed controlling mission has to focus on the action of the Government or on the assessment of some public policies or a law passed over a year. The acceptable petitions will be published on the platform and opened to signature. In order to be examined by the Conference of the Presidents of the Senate who can decide to inscribe them at the agenda, the petitions have to collect at least 100 000 signatures in a maximum of 6 months.

Between the launching of the platform on January, 20th 2020 and the 20th of December 2022, 593 petitions have been deposited. After examination of their acceptability, 385 petitions have been published. Four petitions reached the step of 100 000 signatures and have been examined by the Presidency Conference (three were about hunting).

On December 2022, 20th, those 593 petitions collected 669 594 signatures. A too high step of signatures can be dissuasive. The step of the Senate is judged easier to reach, and constitutes a vector of mobilization.

The Senate platform benefits from a good indices of trust. It is an important tool for the image of the Senate, showing the sincerity of its commitment for a more participative democracy. The Senate is fully committed to increase the participation of the citizens to the various parliamentary missions. The setting of on online tools allowed the creation of a strong link between the Parliament and the citizens and contributing to the 5 affirmation of societal subjects. This precious capital for the French Senate will be reinforced in the coming months and years. Thank you.



Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked the member for their presentation and invited questions from the floor on the presentations we have heard.

Mr Ingvar Mattson (Sweden) commented that possibly the impact of the petitions on legislation was small and asked what function does this fulfil? He enquired if there is a risk the petitions systems suggests to the public they will have an impact on legislation which, in fact, is not possible?

Ms Sarah Davies (UK) responded that one of the things the House of Commons does is manage the expectations of the petitioners. It is correct that there is not a direct impact into the legislative process, that process already has a public bill committee stage which enables engagement from civic society. Instead, it connects issues to the legislation, creating a link between the issue of the petitioners and the legislation. This helps people to feel that their views have been taken into account. There is also a link with the select committee system as committee's look at past, present and future legislation. She agreed with his points but stated that the advantage of the current system is that a Member may then choose to bring an amendment as a result of the process, the House of Commons notifies the petitioners if this does occur.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, observed that the Association is and will remain a unique and valuable platform for sharing learning and thinking on shared issues and to reflect on the common destiny of mankind. Secondly, we hear from parliaments around the world about new challenges in a new world. The birth of the parliamentary process came in the 13th century, in the UK, for a historian this is not a long period, it was a response to expectations from society. Times have changed, we have a new world, as the Korean representative stated with great insight. We all need to innovate and adapt to the deep-set changes that face our societies. Humankind's genius is its capacity for innovation. He said there are many innovations, we are in the land of pearls, and we have heard many pearls of best practice today from colleagues. It would be wonderful to make sure such examples feature in our guide for digital transformation.

9. Concluding remarks

Mr Najib El Khadi, President announced the deadline for depositing candidacy for Vice-President post has now passed. Our friend Mr Nehmelman, from the Senate of the Netherlands, may I ask you to validate by applause his appointment.

The appointment was *approved* by acclamation. He thanked all members for participating in a full and interesting debate and invited them to return for the next day's session from 10.00am. He closed the sitting.

The sitting ended at 5.17 pm.

THIRD SITTING

Monday 13 March 2023 (morning)

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, in the Chair

The sitting was opened at 10.15am

1. Introductory remarks

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, invited members to take their seats and welcomed them back to the meeting.

He informed the Association that it been invited to attend an event, in the plenary room, at 1pm on the occasion of International Women’s Day, which is about the achievements of the Kingdom of Bahrain on gender balance. After which, there will be a lunch and a tour of the parliament.

He announced the decision of the Executive Committee that for future sessions extra places on excursions, lunches and visits would be limited to Secretary General plus 1 person, or 2 people if there is an interpreter.

2. Members

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, asked members to welcome the following new members of the Association, who had been put before the Executive Committee and agreed to:

Mrs Valérie SEMPORE SOUBEIGA

Secretary General of the Transitional Legislative Assembly, Burkina Faso

Mr Abele SAKULU

Deputy Secretary General of Parliament, Fiji

Mr Abdelnasir GULED

Secretary General of the Senate, Somalia

The new Members were accepted.

3. Elections

Mr Najib El Khadi, President offered, Remco Nehmelman, Clerk of the Senate in the Netherlands, the opportunity to say a few words following his election by acclimation to the post of Vice-President of the Association.

Remco Nehmelman, Vice-President, spoke as follows:

Thank you very much dear colleagues, for your support, in the coming years I will do my best to support you and the Executive Committee in its work. I have enjoyed the productive meetings of the Executive Committee in Bahrain,

discussing future topics for debate. I will lead the working group on the topic, first introduced by Simon Burton, on the 'The role of the Secretary General in the 21st Century'. I would also like to say, in response to the interesting comments from Korea, that I am interested in holding a debate on the implications of Artificial Intelligence for parliaments and the challenges for parliaments of regulating this area and the role of parliament in doing so.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked Mr Nehmelman and expressed his confidence, and that of the entire Executive Committee, in this appointment. He gave further explanations about the project to create a questionnaire and guide on 'The role of the Secretary General in the 21st Century'. A working group would be created, with representation from different geographical areas, which would count on Mr Nehmelman for the undertaking of the work.

4. Orders of the Day

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, announced two changes to the Orders of the Day:

- The addition of a new communication, from Mrs Silvia Claudia Milhacea of Romania, on the topic of climate change.
- On Wednesday 15 March, the announcement of a new IPU project.

He called on Members to propose topics for the agenda for the next session in Angola. He set out some of the ideas for the future programme which were discussed in the Executive Committee; the relationship between staff and parliamentarians, participation of citizens, artificial intelligence. He invited proposals on any topics and committed to prepare the best possible agenda for the next session.

5. Communication: Mr Sherlock E. Isaacs, Secretary General, Parliament of Guyana on 'Sectoral Committees in the Parliament of Guyana'

Mr Sherlock E. Isaacs, Secretary General, Parliament of Guyana, spoke as follows:

Introduction

The results of the 1997 General and Regional elections in Guyana were disputed and created a great disturbance which caused the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Leaders enjoined on the Leaders of the two main political parties in Guyana to find a solution to resolve the disturbance. The two Political Leaders agreed to a shared Governance System. To this end, the Leaders of the two main political parties at that time, Mrs. Janet Jagan of the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) and Mr. Desmond Hoyte of the People's National Congress (PNC), entered into two agreements:

- the Herdmanston Accord on January 17, 1998; and
- the St. Lucia Statement on July 2, 1998

The agreement and the statement were efforts to resolve the situation and to find a way to settle the socio-political problem in Guyana. Additionally, the Leaders

embarked on a dialogue which paved the way for Constitutional Reform and enabling recommendations for the proper functioning of the National Assembly to be made.

A Constitutional Reform Commission was established and, in order to allow the Opposition to participate more meaningfully in the governance of the country, 3 recommended the establishment of four Sectoral Committees to ensure that the Government is kept transparent and accountable. The four Sectoral Committees are:

- Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources
- Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services
- Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations
- Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services

Background of the Sectoral Committees

The idea of establishing the Sectoral Committees was, and still is, that the National Assembly would be more deliberative, forceful, vigilant and participatory, thus fulfilling its role as the watchdog of the people of Guyana; in essence, its principal role is one of an oversight function. The Sectoral Committees are responsible for scrutinizing all areas of Government policy and administration. They have the power to examine all policies and administration for each sector to determine whether the execution of Government policies is in consonance with the principle of good governance and in the best interest of the nation.

Roles of Sectoral Committees

The Committees allow the Assembly to perform simultaneously numerous essential functions that otherwise might not be conducted at all. These include a detailed review of proposed legislation; oversight and scrutiny of the executive branch activities; examination of and reporting on policy issues; and conducting special investigations.

Functions of Sectoral Committees

These four Sectoral Committees have the authority to:

- (a) determine areas of Government activity for scrutiny or specific examination;
- (b) request the Minister assigned responsibilities for the sector to submit written or oral information, including government documents and records about any specific area of government policy and administration;
- (c) review existing legislation on government policy and administration for any of the sector;
- (d) summon persons to give evidence in accordance with the Legislative Bodies (Evidence) Act Chapter 1:08 of the Laws of Guyana;
- (e) scrutinize government documents, papers, and records;
- (f) visit any government activity or project in Guyana as agreed and arranged by the Sectoral Committee;
- (g) in the discharge of their mandate, utilize the services of experts, specialists and other sources of advice as the Committees may determine;
- (h) establish a timetable for the conduct of their work;
- (i) make recommendations to the Assembly on legislation or any other action to be taken on matters falling within their purview; and
- (j) submit periodic reports to the National Assembly on their work.

The National Assembly may request a Sectoral Committee to enquire into and report on any aspect of the policy or administration of the Government within its terms of reference.

Within sixty days of the presentation of a report from a Sectoral Committee, the Government shall, upon the request of the Committee, table a comprehensive response thereto.

Sectoral Committees report to the National Assembly from time to time but can also report on the progress of their work for the previous year and its work programme for the ensuing year. Reports of the Committees remain confidential until they are presented to the National Assembly.

Areas of Scrutiny of Sectoral Committees

The Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources (PSCNR) Some of the areas of scrutiny of this Committee are:

- ♣ Geology and mines
- ♣ Water resources ♣ Acquisition/transferral/occupation of lands
- ♣ Hydrometeorology
- ♣ Forestry
- ♣ Natural resources/environment
- ♣ Wildlife
- ♣ Land use
- ♣ Thermal & hydro power

The Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services (PSCES) Some of the areas of scrutiny of this Committee are:

- ♣ Public works
- ♣ Communications
- ♣ Public utilities
- ♣ Regional development
- ♣ Housing
- ♣ Agriculture (rice, sugar, fisheries)
- ♣ Drainage & irrigation
- ♣ Roads
- ♣ River and sea defence
- ♣ Consumer protection
- ♣ National insurance

The Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations (PSCFR) Some of the areas of scrutiny of this Committee are:

- ♣ Foreign trade
- ♣ International organisations
- ♣ CARICOM
- ♣ Technical cooperation/developing countries

- ♣ Foreign aid
- ♣ Diplomatic relations
- ♣ Multilateral relations
- ♣ Cabinet matters 8
- ♣ Organisation of Islamic Conferences
- ♣ National security
- ♣ The Commonwealth

Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services (PSCSS)

Some of the areas of scrutiny of this Committee are:

- ♣ Culture
- ♣ Libraries
- ♣ Censorship
- ♣ Youth affairs
- ♣ Primary, Secondary, Technical, and Higher Education
- ♣ Examinations local and overseas ♣ School Feeding Programme
- ♣ Children Services
- ♣ Adoption Services
- ♣ Probation and Welfare
- ♣ Occupational Health and Safety
- ♣ Amerindian Affairs (Indigenous People's Affairs)
- ♣ Health Services, primary health care, public hospitals, clinics, etc.
- ♣ Rehabilitation Services, Blood Bank
- ♣ Consumer Affairs

To have effective committee oversight, there must be regular questioning, monitoring, probing, and always insisting that Ministers and other executive officials provide the committee with all requested information.

Composition and Structure of the Sectoral Committees

Membership of Sectoral Committees

Each Committee consists of seven (7) Members, four (4) representing the Government and three (3) representing the Opposition. The Government and Opposition are entitled to elect one alternate Member for each Sectoral Committee.⁵

The composition provides the Committees with an ideal atmosphere for discussions and the exchange of views.

Chairmanship of Sectoral Committees

Each Sectoral Committee has a Chairperson and a Vice Chairperson elected from among the Members of the Government and the Opposition, respectively. The Chairperson and Vice Chairperson alternate annually with two (2) Sectoral Committees chaired by the Government and two (2) chaired by the Opposition.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked the member for their presentation and invited questions from the floor.

Mr Bharat Raj Gautam (Nepal) asked about the response of the Government to the recommendations of the sectoral committees, is the response mandatory or obligatory, is any action of the Government required? He further asked whether sectoral committees also scrutinise bills? Or, whether they only fulfil an oversight function?

Mr Eric JANSE (Canada), commented on the remit of the sectoral committees which are very broad, he asked whether it is possible for them to create sub-committees in order to tackle multiple issues, or is it the whole committee which looks at all the issues?

Mr Mohamed Barka (Algeria), asked what is the legal basis for the sectoral committees, is it set out in the constitution?

Mr Sherlock E. Isaacs (Guyana) responded that the role of the committees is listed in the standing orders, but the Government often does not respond to the reports of the committees. The sectoral committees do scrutinise bills, it is listed in the duties and functions of the committee. Finally, the legal basis for the committees is set out in the constitution and yes, they are able to form sub-committees.



6. Communication: Mr Dhammika Dasanayake, Secretary General of Parliament of Sri Lanka on 'Electing an Executive President by Parliament in extraordinary circumstances'

Mr Dhammika Dasanayake, Secretary General of Parliament of Sri Lanka, spoke as follows:

The History and the Background

The Sri Lankan Constitution provides for the election of an Executive President for a period of five years. The Executive power of the People, including defence of Sri Lanka, has to be exercised by the President of the Republic, elected by the People. Once elected, the President cannot be removed unless by way of an impeachment motion, which has to be signed by two thirds of the whole number of Members of Parliament or in the alternative by one half of the whole number of Parliament and the Speaker has to be convinced that the allegations contained in the motion warrant further inquiry by the Supreme Court. Once accepted the motion has to be carried with two-thirds majority of the Parliament and forwarded to the Supreme for inquiry. Accordingly, the Office of the President is well protected by the Constitution. The Constitution vests substantial powers on the President, including dissolution of Parliament after two and half years of it being elected.

The President appoints the Prime Minister and the Cabinet of Ministers. President Gotabaya Rajapakse was elected as the 8th Executive President of Sri Lanka on the 18th November 2019, with an overwhelming majority, succeeding Maithripala Sirisena who was the 7th Executive President of Sri Lanka. Within a short time after elections, Sri Lanka together with many other countries of the world had to face severe repercussions with the onset of the covid -19 pandemic. In combination with a certain degree of economic mismanagement and balance of payments issues, a major economic and debt crisis emerged which led to high inflation, shortage of fuel and cooking gas, major surge in cost of living and power outages.

In this background, a mass movement supported by some opposition parties, calling themselves 'Aragalaya' or 'Struggle' took to streets calling for the resignation of Hon. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the incumbent President and his Government.

In July 2022, the protesters stormed the President's House and the President's Office in Colombo, forcing the President to resign from office on the 14th of July 2022, by a letter addressed to the Speaker. Consequent to the resignation of Hon. Gotabaya Rajapaksa from office of the President, the Parliament elected the Hon. Ranil Wickremasinghe as the 9th President of Sri Lanka on the 20th July, 2022 for the balance period of Presidency of the Hon. Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

The Election of the President

The incumbent President Hon. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, by a letter dated 14th July, 2022 addressed to the Speaker, resigned from the Office of the President. The Speaker summoned a Party Leaders meeting immediately thereafter and informed the Party Leaders the process of electing a President for the balance period of the Presidency of the Hon. Gotabaya Rajapaksa in keeping with the provisions of Article 40 of the Constitution and the 'Election of President Special Provisions Act No. 02 of 1981'. At this meeting, the Speaker gave an undertaking to the Party Leaders that the election process will take place, adhering to the highest norms of transparent and accountable procedures, as envisaged in the Constitution. He also appealed to the Political Leaders, Government Officials, Security Forces and the People to extend their fullest cooperation at this critical hour. The Speaker particularly, appealed to the people to allow their Members of Parliament to attend Parliament without any obstacles to participate in the process of electing a new President and promised to complete the task within a period 7 days. The Party Leaders were informed that the Parliament will be summoned to meet on the 16th of July at 10 am, to make the formal announcement on the resignation of the President and to inform the date for accepting of nominations.

The Constitution provides that, in the event of a vacancy in the office of the President, prior to the expiration of his term, the Parliament shall elect as President, one of its Members who is qualified to be elected to the office of President. Any person so succeeding to the office of the President, shall hold office only for the unexpired period of the term of office of the President vacating office. The Constitution further provides that, such election will be held soon as possible after and in no case later than one month. The particular Article goes on to say that the election shall be by secret ballot and by an absolute majority of the votes cast in accordance with the procedure as Parliament may by law provide.

In compliance of the above legal requirements, particularly the Presidential Elections (Special Provisions) Act No. 2 of 1981 the necessary steps were adopted. 4 The Law provides that the occurrence of the vacancy will operate as summoning of the Parliament to meet within three days. The Law obligates the Secretary General to issue a Gazette notification to summon the Parliament to inform the Parliament that a vacancy has arisen in the Office of the President and to announce the date on which the nominations will be received for the election of the President.

The Conduct of the Election

The Secretary General of Parliament issued a Gazette notification, summoning Parliament to meet on the 16th of July, 2022 at 10 am. Accordingly, the Parliament met on the 16th July and the House was officially informed of the vacancy and a date was fixed by the Secretary General of Parliament for the acceptance of nominations for the succeeding President. The Law requires that such date being a date not earlier than 48 hours and not later than 7 days of the date of the meeting. The Law also provides that the Secretary General shall be the Returning Officer for the election of the President.

The Secretary General informed the House that the Parliament will meet on the 19th of July at 10 am to accept nominations and the following rules will apply ;

- That any Member of Parliament who intend to propose another Member as a candidate for the election of the President must obtain his consent to hold that post in writing and the said letter shall be handed over to the Secretary General at the time the name is proposed,
- The Member whose is to be nominated shall be present in the House at the relevant time and his name shall be seconded by another Member who is also present in the House. However no debate will be allowed in the House.
- If only one Member is nominated and seconded by the House, he will be declared as having been duly elected as the succeeding President by the Secretary General of Parliament.
- If more than one Member is nominated, elections will be held for the office of the President within 48 hours after having accepted nominations.
- The Fixing of the date for elections will be by way of a resolution passed by Parliament.
- The Member intended to be nominated must be a person who is qualified to hold the office of the President.

As informed by the Secretary General of Parliament, the Parliament met on the 19th of July and three names of Members of Parliament were proposed and were duly seconded by three other Members of the House.

Thereupon the Parliament resolved to meet again on the 20th July, 2022 to conduct the election for the electing of the President. The Secretary General and his team of officials had to make all preparations to conduct the secret ballot within a time span of 24 hours, having printed the necessary ballot papers and making arrangements to facilitate the ballot within the Chambers of the Parliament. All preparations were done and a rehearsal was also carried out addressing all possible eventualities. The

ballot could involve counting several rounds to ascertain which candidate has secured the absolute majority after having eliminated the candidate who would have got the least number of votes. Extra sets of ballot papers were also printed in different colours to face any situation where a vote has to be cancelled and a new poll has to be conducted. Separate boxes were prepared with numbers representing the three candidates being fixed on them, to facilitate the counting of the ballots. Score sheets were printed to enable officers to maintain the records, including the total number of ballots cast, the number of valid votes polled and the number of spoilt votes and the number each candidate received and the absolute majority required.

As resolved, the Parliament met on the 20th of July 2022 to elect the President for the balance period of the presidency of the former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

At the commencement of the sittings the Secretary General explained to the Members of the Parliament, the rules pertaining to the conduct of the elections ;

– At the very inception, the quorum bell will be rung for five minutes informing the Members of Parliament that the election will take place in the Chamber shortly,

– The empty ballot box will be shown to all Members before the commencement of the poll and sealed in their presence.

– For the purpose of casting their vote, the names of the Members will be called in the order they are placed in the division list, commencing with the Speaker being called to vote first.

– The Secretary General will place his initials on the reverse side of each ballot paper at the time they are handed over to the Member. 6

– If a Member inadvertently spoils a ballot paper, he can request for a new ballot paper before he puts it in the box and the Secretary General can issue a new ballot paper after having cancelled the previous ballot paper.

– The Members have to mark the ballot papers in the consoles provided for this purpose but will not be allowed to photograph the marked ballot paper.

– The Members who are absent when their name is called will be called again after all other names are called at the end.

– Each Candidate by himself or by appointing another Member can observe the counting of the ballots at the table.

– By law, Members are required to mark the ballot paper with the no 1 and they could also express a second preference by also inserting no 2 in front of the name of a candidate. The law specifically provides that ballot papers which are not marked with no 1 are invalid.

– If a Member inserts any signature or other sign on the ballot paper, the law stipulates that the respective ballot paper should be treated as an invalid ballot. – A ballot paper without the initials of the Secretary General on the reverse side is also invalid.

– The Members were also told that since the Constitution mandates a secret ballot, they should desist from displaying the ballot paper to the House.

Accordingly, the election of the President was conducted on the 20th July ,2022 at 10 am and in the first round itself the leading candidate received 134 votes securing an absolute majority and was declared elected as the 9th Executive President of Sri Lanka.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked the member for their presentation and invited questions from the floor.

Mr Manuel Caverro (Spain) asked if any of the candidates for the election addressed the assembly or whether they go straight into the vote, is there opportunity for a speech before colleagues? Secondly, who is the acting president, and takes the office of the Head of State during the period of the vacancy, until the new President is elected?

Mr Jean MUKUALA BATEKE (Democratic Republic of Congo) said the constitution of Sri Lanka clearly grants the Secretary General great power in this context. He asked whether is this a role the Secretary General takes alone or in conjunction with the bureau of Parliament or the Speaker?

Mr Dhammika Dasanayake (Sri Lanka) responded that there is no opportunity for any candidates to address parliament in the rules. On the second point, in the absence of the President it is the Prime Minister who acts, in the absence of the Prime Minister, it is the Speaker. In response to Congo, he agreed it was the highest responsibility during his career, he explained that under the rules he had to take independent decisions, with sole responsibility. However, in practice, he did consult the Speaker about the timeline but as the returning officer the responsibility was his alone. In preparation, he asked advice from the Attorney General, who advised he could even reject a candidate for President if he felt the conditions set out in the rules were not met.

Mr Mahmoud Etman (Egypt) highlighting the exceptional circumstances, asked if the candidate must be a member of the parliament and what is the process in normal constitutional times?

Mr Ahmed Mohammed AL NADABI (Oman), asked what happened, before the President's household was raided, what was the Parliament doing, why did it not succeed in quelling the uprising of the people? On the point of including youth in parliament as a result, he asked whether the parliament has previously distanced itself from youth and the people?

Mr Jean MUKUALA BATEKE (Democratic Republic of Congo) commented that these were truly exceptional circumstances which led a Secretary General to take an exceptional role, in the case of Sri Lanka this had been a tremendous elevation. He invited all colleagues to applaud the Secretary general from Sri Lanka for the role he played in his parliament.

Mr Dhammika Dasanayake (Sri Lanka) said in response to Egypt, a President is usually elected by the people for 5 years, it is only if a vacancy arises during this period that Parliament is obligated to elect a President for the balancing period. He informed the Association that Sri Lanka has an ongoing programme with universities where parliamentary staff conduct lectures and undertake programmes. This academic discussion raised the question of whether a president, elected by parliament, should have the same powers as one elected by the people? Academics

asked if the mandate is lesser from this form of election? The Secretary General advised the academics that it is only a substitute President for the balancing period, then the people will elect. He emphasised that it is an open debate in Sri Lanka, particularly amongst the youth in Sri Lanka.

In response to Oman, he said that the President is the Commander of all forces and gave an order for guards not to fire a single bullet in the unrest. He then chose to resign. There was tear gas to quell the protests. Parliament doesn't have any role in controlling public demonstrations, people did gather outside the Parliament but it was not affected by the public unrest. He said Sri Lanka had not alienated the youth but perhaps Sri Lanka was not attuned to the aspirations of youth, the youth today expect more. Consequently, they introduced 5 new youth places at the sectoral committees. The youth representatives can ask questions from experts. The Sri Lankan Parliament is answering the people with youth participation in parliamentary work, revamping the website to enable interactive facilities. The Sri Lankan Parliament is now taking this very seriously and increasing use of social media. He concluded by thanking his colleague from Congo for his kind words.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, commented that this presentation confirms the fundamental role of parliaments in securing stability in their countries, and that the role of the Secretary General is one of deep responsibility.



General Debate: Gender inequality in parliaments - what are the solutions?

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, proposed a change, with agreement of the Executive Committee, to the election timetable for the vacant post as ordinary member of the Executive Committee.

The deadline for submitting candidacy for the post is changed to Tuesday 14 March at midday, if there is need for an election it will take place at 5pm tomorrow. This is to enable maximum participation from Members of the Association in nay election which may take place.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, invited Jose Pedro Montero, Vice-President to moderate the General Debate:

Jose Pedro Montero, Vice-President, spoke as follows:

I would first like to say that I am opening this General Debate on behalf of our colleague, Madame Penelope Tyawa of the South African Parliament, who is a former member of the ASGP Executive Committee. She proposed the topic of this debate but unfortunately cannot be here to lead the discussions today.

In her place, I will first take a few minutes to introduce the subject of today's general debate and then pose some questions which I hope will inspire a lively

debate from the floor. All members are invited to participate spontaneously in this debate, to share the experiences of your parliaments and your thoughts on this important subject.

Gender equality is in the interest of both men and women, and a precondition for genuine democracy. But for many years, the responsibility of defending women's rights and gender equality in parliaments rested mainly on the shoulders of women.

Parliaments mirror our societies. They aspire to represent and respond to everyday reality. Many women around the world still lack basic human rights and face discrimination and gender-based violence. The world's parliaments are no exception. Although, as discussed by Ms Kareen Jabre yesterday in her excellent presentation, there have been many improvements in recent years. The truth is that most parliaments remain male-dominated, and women are often under-represented on decision-making bodies. This is true in many parliaments at the administrative level as well as at the political level.

We need only look around the room today to notice that, although women make up 50% of the world population, the percentage of women in our own Association today is far below this level. What is different at the administrative level is that we, as Secretaries General, have the power to change how we recruit and promote our staff and to change the culture of the organisations that we lead.

In Uruguay, for 10 years, there have been lists in the national elections which must have only 2 of the same gender for every group of 3. The Uruguayan parliament has also introduced policies to tackle bullying and harassment.

Ms Tyawa, in proposing this general debate, did not want us to focus on the problems. The title of this general debate asks you, dear colleagues, what are the solutions?

I know that many colleagues here are passionate about this important issue and I look forward to hearing the experiences from your parliaments. I will now open the debate to the floor. What does your parliament do well?

Mr CUONG Bui Van (Vietnam) said first of all, I appreciate that the ASGP has chosen gender equality in Parliaments to discuss at this meeting. Gender equality is of great significance, as it is one of the striving goals of countries around the world towards the promotion of a progressive, equal and sustainable society, and is a top concern at regional and international parliamentary fora. In the process of policy-making, parliaments need to promote their role in addressing inequality, and at the same time, they must really become legislative bodies that respect and represent gender equality.

Secondly, in Viet Nam, promoting gender equality and women's rights is a consistent policy of our Party and State, and it is enshrined in the Constitution and guaranteed in practice. The National Assembly of Viet Nam has passed many legal documents

(such as the Constitution, the Law on Gender Equality, the Law on Elections of National Assembly Deputies and People's Council deputies, etc.) to protect and promote women's empowerment and encourage women's participation in economic - political – social affairs During the review and adoption of laws, it is necessary to put in place a gender impact assessment for each policy.

In addition, the Standing Committee of the National Assembly of Viet Nam has given instructions to strengthen training, capacity building for female candidates participating in election campaigns as well as female National Assembly deputies once they are elected; strengthen communication and raise awareness for voters and people about the role of women participating in the National Assembly.

As a result, our National Assembly has recorded many progressive outcomes on gender equality, such as:

- The proportion of female deputies in the National Assembly has increased gradually through each term: the 13th term (2011-2016) 24.2%, the 14th term (2016-2021) 27.31%, the 15th term (2021-2026) 30.26% respectively. According to IPU's Global Data on National Parliaments by February 2023, Viet Nam ranks 64th in terms of the percentage of female parliamentarians.
- The XIV 14th National Assembly entered in the history of Viet Nam's National Assembly as for the first time the President of the National Assembly was a woman.
- The 15th National Assembly currently has 151 female deputies; The Standing Committee of the National Assembly has 03 female members; The Ethnic Minority Council and 9 Committees have 18 female leaders, accounting for 40% of the total number of their leaders.
- The Female Parliamentarians' Group of our National Assembly was established during the 12th Legislature, in the span of 3 terms, it has become a forum for female deputies to share experiences on operational skills and support for deputies to perform more effectively their representative role.

Thirdly, with a view to further advancing gender equality, I would like to put forward following recommendations:

1. ASGP should compile a report summarizing experiences, recommendations to be sent to IPU to adopt a resolution, report or Declaration on gender equality in Parliaments. On that basis, commitments can be turned into specific actions.
2. It is necessary to promote inter-parliamentary cooperation and cooperation among member parliaments, UN organizations and international forums on women to better ensure women's rights. Countries that have made progress in gender equality should share their experiences with others.
3. IPU needs to strengthen training and capacity enhancement for key female parliamentarians in parliamentary performance; on capacity to incorporate international commitments on gender equality into domestic laws; on how to approach the law through the lens of gender; on skills to analyze data on gender equality during law-making process. On that basis, these female parliamentarians will become the core group to perform training and retraining for other female parliamentarians.

Mr Mahmoud Etman (Egypt) said that Egypt has signed up to and brought into law many of the international conventions on women's rights. The state is taking all measures to guarantee women their right to public jobs and posts and to protect them against all forms of violence. Egypt is trying to strike the balance between women's family needs and the job roles. The senate adopted, in 2020, a law which stipulated female representation must be no less than 10% and it now has 13% representation with 41 females in the Senate. Female representation is increasing in line with the constitution, most women who submitted candidacy at recent elections achieved their aims. Egypt has also elected a female from the Opposition to a senior management role. In each office the number of females is around 30%, there is no discrimination in the Egyptian Senate.

Mr Rajit Punhani (India) said that in India the participation of women has also improved, underlining that not there is almost as many women as men who vote, which is an important step towards equality. Amongst women, the voting rate is now 67% which demonstrates their growing desire to participate in politics.

He further added that a constitutional amendment in 1992 represented another important step to improve equality between genders in India. The amendment mandates that in local government a third of seats are reserved for women. He underlined that this political move had greatly increased the number of women in politics in 20 out of 28 provinces.

Mr Naim COBAN (Türkiye) said that many political parties are trying to increase the number of female representatives. In the Grand National Assembly, practical actions include creating a Committee on Gender Equality which is contributing to the female representation in politics and all spheres of life. The Committee executed a project in 2017, for a Gender Responsive Budget, with some pilot practices which have had concrete results on policies and action plans. All administrators and parliament staff also had awareness training during the budget process. Turkey is also considering how to monitor United National indicators for women.

Mrs Kareema ALABBASI (Bahrain) commented that the percentage of female parliamentarians in Bahrain is now 25%. In addition, they have a committee of women and children which is tasked with all legislation linked to women and children. With regards to leadership of Shura Council, of which 35% of positions are filled by women, there is another committee on equality called the Gender Balance Committee. Its findings apply to both genders, there is no discrimination against women in matter of promotion and employment. She also noted that the posts of secretary general are open to both men and women, as are all promotions. She concluded by saying there is no discrimination against women who aim for promotion in the parliament of Bahrain.

Ms Fathimath NIUSHA (Maldives) said that in the Maldives women's rights are assured by the constitution but women continue to be underrepresented at decision making levels, only 4 out of 87 MPs in parliament are women. There are similarly low levels at local level. However, the tide is now changing at local council elections due to a legislative amendment holding that women must take 30% of seats. The Maldives is also working with UNDP on a programme to develop women via civic

education and policy training which is followed by a practice parliament where women participate in a mock parliament. After 6 mock parliaments, she hoped there will be more female candidates for the elections. Rather than amending the laws to reserve seats for women, the parties themselves have agreed to reserve seats for women. Staff are protected from bullying and harassment by internal committees set up by law with various procedures to tackle this issue in the Maldivian parliament.

Ms Lydia Kandetu (Namibia) said the ruling party in Namibia has taken a principled approach with regards to 50% representation of women, as a result in 2020 we have reached 46% representation in parliament, which to us is a huge achievement. Namibia got independence in 1990, it is a new country, the political will is strong, we hope that in the next election we will reach 50%, we can see other political parties will follow the leading party in taking this approach towards 50% representation.

Chloe Mawson (United Kingdom) responding on the bullying and staff misconduct point, said that this has been a focus in the UK. In the UK women make up 35% of the House of Commons and only 25% of the House of Lords. She said that a few years ago an independent system with a hotline and investigation functions was setup. Since then, 2 members of the House of Lords have permanently lost the right to sit in the House and several MPs have been suspended for their conduct. Parliamentary staff have also been sanctioned through this system. She said it is an important part of showing that bullying and sexual harassment will not be tolerated. The complaints are not limited to women, many men have also used the system. Staff surveys show bullying and harassment remain a problem, the independent service is crucial but she said they also have to deal with the underlying culture which permits this behaviour and training about acceptable behaviour has been launched.

Mr Philippe Delivet (France) said that in France much has been accomplished since the constitutional review of 1999, which imposed quotas on parties and consequences in terms of funding. They now have 37% representation amongst MPs and 35% of senators. At local level there has been significant progress too. With regards to access to senior positions of responsibility, the PM, Speaker, 20% of Mayors and 22% regional leaders are women. The further you move away from senior posts the more women you find.

In the Senate, in terms of sharing of responsibilities, more women have responsibility for portfolios such as young people, culture or children than for finance portfolios. A delegation on the rights of women, constituted in 1999, proposed actions to remedy this imbalance. It proposed obligatory gender parity at local executive level, to strengthen the obligations of political parties and have gender parity for municipal elections.

He added that the secretariat of the Senate is composed of 46% women, 4 of 8 vice-presidents are women but the post of president and the post of financial officers are all occupied by men. In June 2021, the Senate modified its rules to ensure that list of candidates for the secretariat must demonstrate a balanced representation of women and men. He said that access to senior roles in the secretariat for women is a preoccupation of the Secretary General.

Finally, with regards to harassment, he said there is an internal procedure and a code of conduct in the senate. There is also an ethics body which is capable of making recommendations and pronouncing sanctions on senators.

Mr Sherlock E Isaacs (Guyana) said that all political parties in Guayana are aiming to secure at least a third of elected members as women. At the moment, of the 71 elected members 26 are women which is 37%. With respect to sexual harassment, he said they have a very serious laws which decree very heavy fines for sexual offences. With respect to women in the administration of the parliament office, he said he has 9 departments of which 7 are headed by women. He has 122 staff of which 85 are females.

Ms Steejit TAIPIBOONSUK (Thailand) said that the Thai parliamentary service has guidelines which focus on preventing sexual abuse and harassment, including for intern students, and they also have a process for sexual abuse with formal and informal compliant channels. They want to ensure victims have effective routes to redress and they provide training to all those in parliament on dealing with sexual harassment.

They have recruited more than 100 parliamentary police of which women represent over 15%. In 2017, under the the Thai constitution, they launched a gender responsive budget and since then they have collaborated with the UN women's group to ensure allocation of public funds and resources are done in ways that advance female empowerment. They also have a standing committee on women, the elderly and LGBT people. The committee has achieved gender parity for the first time in parliamentary history.

Ms Ragna ÁRNADÓTTIR (Iceland) said that there is ongoing work in the Icelandic Parliament on gender equality with some successful projects, some unsuccessful and some initiatives where the outcome is not clear. They have a strategy to eliminate violence and harassment and both the procedure and the strategy which applies to MPs is being discussed. The legal status of MPs is different from staff and she has been informed that parliament is different to other firms or companies. However, where there are accusations this is outside the scope of responsibility of the speaker and has this nothing to do with the institution. She said that in the wake of the 'me too' movement parliaments must be careful to decide what they are and are not responsible for.

In Iceland, they asked an academic to explore the question and they found that MPs cannot be excluded from responsibility and that legal provisions in labour law apply to parliament. MPs have criminal liability under general criminal code and tort is also possible under the law. She said that MPs have some immunities but the scope is limited and can always be revoked. Inappropriate conduct cannot be overlooked in Iceland by the parliament, especially between staff and MPs. The speaker and the secretary general have a responsibility to act within the law.

Finally, she discussed the draft strategy presented to parliament which sets out a specific statute for parliamentarians. It proposes that a complaint must be made to

the party leader, the speaker of the assembly and the secretary general. All three must be informed of any incident. At this stage, there is no specific sanction but a mediation process.

Mr Sumariyandono SOEDOMO (Indonesia) said that Indonesia has ratified numerous UN conventions on the rights for women. The Indonesian constitution states the aim of 30% representation for women at all political levels. The number of women has increased and, following the 2019 election, it is now at 21% of MPs and the speaker position is now held by a woman.

He suggested the following factors are preventing equal representation: the influence of traditional gender roles, the difficulty in accessing political world, the problem of the 'all boys club', harmful stereotypes, the intellectual world is not open for women which reduces their participation, a lack of women confident to enter the political arena and a lack of support internally and externally to assist women in entering politics, including a mass media which stops women's potential.

Mr Omar AL-NUAIMI (UAE) said that in the UAE they have 50% representation of female MPs due to legislation which reserved half of the seats for women. However, he recognised the challenge mentioned by his colleague from France that some committees, such as health and other soft committees, are populated by women where as foreign affairs and finance it is all men. A request has been made to parliament to try and ensure every committees should have members made up of both women and men, this request is still pending.

Jose Pedro Monetero, Vice-President, concluded by thanking everyone for contributing on this important topic. He also thanked Ms Tyawa, who originally proposed the debate which led to many valuable contributions.

7. Concluding remarks

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked members for their interesting and varied contributions and applauded the diversity of the interventions. He reminded members that we return at 2.30pm.

He closed the sitting.

The sitting ended at 12.45

FOURTH SITTING

Tuesday 14 March 2023 (morning)

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, in the Chair

The sitting was opened at 10 pm

1. Introductory remarks

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, welcomed everyone back to resume work. He expressed thanks, on behalf of the Association, for the excellent lunch and visit organised by the Parliament of Bahrain.

He reminded members that the deadline for putting forward candidacy for the vacant post of ordinary members of the Executive Committee was noon. Any election would take place at 16.30, to ensure members could attend the cultural event. He recalled that Associations' rules require diversity of gender, geographical spread and language in the membership of the Executive Committee.

2. Communication: Mr Manuel Caverro, Secretary General of the Spanish Senate, on 'Online voting system in the Spanish Senate'

Mr Manuel Caverro, Secretary General of the Spanish Senate, spoke as follows:

Introduction.

Parliaments are the basic institutions in democratic States. In parliament, MPs first debate and afterwards vote. Debate and vote take place in person. So it is the symbol of the essence of parliament for the citizens: this is how parliament works.

Voting is a central element of democratic parliamentary activity. While debate is the parliamentary instrument that allows MPs to express their various political opinions, voting is the mechanism used to express the will of the parliament, through the adoption of agreements.

Article 79 of the Spanish Constitution establishes the general rules for voting in the Chambers. Section 3 – the relevant section for the purposes of this communication – provides that “the vote of Senators and Deputies is personal and may not be delegated.” This precept is repeated verbatim in Section 92.5 of the Senate Standing Orders.

The requirement for the vote to be personal implies that it is the MP that decides how he/she votes. And he/she can do so freely. In parliaments where political groups have a rigid structure, parliamentary discipline is the instrument used to help

maintain a homogenous political approach within them. Various measures are used to ensure that voting instructions are followed, such as indicating the intended vote or internal political group fines for MPs who vote differently. However, each MP ultimately decides what he/she votes for.

In addition, personal voting means that it cannot be cast by another person. That is why votes cannot be delegated, to prevent the MP from transferring his/her ability to cast the vote to another MP, even with a mandate specifying how he/she wants to vote. It follows the logic that voting takes place after deliberation, which allows for judgment to be formed, one that is formed personally by the MP. If the vote could be delegated and the voting right were to be transferred to the delegate, it would no longer be personal, and if they were given a mandate specifying how to vote, it would have to be done before the deliberation, breaking the logic of parliamentarism.

Obviously, this description corresponds more to an ideal scenario than the practical reality of our assemblies. An ideal scenario that is found in the roots of the idea that each MP represents the people and that the decisions taken in parliament are made after deliberation, in which the rational of the discussions could convince the other MPs of one's own views. Maybe a parliament like this has never existed. In most cases, voting intentions are decided before the start of debates. Changes of opinion following the debates are rare, and if they do occur, they most often affect the vote of all MPs of the political group. It is very rare for MPs to break party line with their vote. But we should not lose sight of these theoretical pillars which are inherent to the essence of parliamentarism and are relevant to what follows.

Right and duty of voting

The Senate Standing Orders make voting a right and duty of senators. In addition, the Spanish Constitutional Court declared that the fundamental right of holding parliamentary office (as established by Article 23.2 of the Spanish Constitution) includes, among other rights, the right to vote.

However, the exercise of this right to vote (and fulfilment of the duty to do so) may be hindered or prevented for different reasons.

Clearly, there may be factual circumstances that prevent an MP from exercising the right to vote, due to the impossibility of physically attending a session (attendance at the session is also a right and a duty of senators under Article 20.1 of the Senate Standing Orders).

Such circumstances include:

- Certain illnesses, accidents, pregnancy and childbirth.
- Events that make it impossible to reach parliament, sometimes due to natural phenomena (such as volcano ash preventing planes from flying, earthquakes that affect the transport infrastructure or the parliament building, a pandemic, etc.) and other situations due to disturbances of public order (such as demonstrations that block access to parliament buildings, transport strikes that bring transport to a halt, etc.).

In other cases, there may be a critical fault in the electronic voting system, when MPs are physically present in the chamber. In such cases, traditional systems such as a show of hands or alike could be used, however, these are not very practical when there are large numbers of votings (particularly complex when there is significant fragmentation in political representation, making it difficult to visually recount the votes).

A third type of scenario that may prevent the exercise of the right to vote in person and justify the authorisation of remote voting are those that take into account other purposes that are considered relevant resulting in the MP not being physically present at parliament. This could be due to:

- Facilitating the dual role of MPs as members of international or regional parliamentary assemblies or their roles as members of local corporations. In this same line, if MPs are also members of government, remote voting may be considered.
- Maternity or paternity leave, to ensure better balance between political and family life.

Certainly, there is an interest, both for parliament and for the political groups, to allow all MPs to cast their votes, so the agreement adopted fully reflects the people's representation. To this aim, different mechanisms are set up to avoid distorted results by the absence of MPs.

Remote voting in the Spanish Senate.

In the Spanish Senate system, the rules governing remote voting include - as we shall see - some of these modalities in which different circumstances make it difficult or impossible to vote in person.

As we have seen, it is based on the constitutional prohibition of delegation and also the difficulty of using other techniques, typically used in some parliaments - such as temporary substitution or pairing -, but alien to the Spanish parliamentary tradition and difficult to apply, especially the latter, where political representation is highly fragmented, as is currently the case in Spain. The aim is therefore to address such circumstances through the regulation and use of remote voting.

It should be noted that remote voting is only used in plenary sessions in the Senate. It is not specified in the Committee as senators may substitute each other. It assumes that the MP voting remotely is in a position to follow the session and the debates via streaming and mobile devices.

The first stage of remote voting: 2013.

By way of amendment to the Senate Standing Orders, remote voting was introduced for the first time in November 2013 (two years after the Spanish Congress of Deputies), with the following requirements:

- The senator must make the request which is then authorised by the Senate Bureau.

- The cases that may be used in the request (with supporting documentation) include pregnancy, maternity or paternity leave, or serious illness that make it impossible for the MP to attend the Senate.
- It can only be used for voting on matters that are not susceptible to fragmentation, which excludes - primarily but not only
- voting on laws and their amendments. - The vote must be cast before the issue is debated, to ensure it is received on time (due to the state of emerging technology in this area) and is added by the Speaker to the votes cast in person.

Without prejudice to the subsequent examination of other aspects, it should be noted that this possibility was very limited in its use, due to the few matters to which it was applicable and, above all, because it could not be used for voting on the most important items on the agenda. Nevertheless, it was a useful test bench for what was to come.

Second stage of remote voting: the pandemic (2020).

All kinds of solutions were required to ensure that the Senate, like all parliaments, could continue to function during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among them was the political agreement to limit the physical presence of senators in the chamber to avoid the spread of the virus as much as possible. This was a political agreement and not legally binding so as to respect each senator's right of attendance. This limitation meant that it was not possible to use the in person electronic voting system.

The Senate agreed (by means of a Supplementary Rule to the Standing Orders of 9 June 2020, issued by madam Speaker) to establish remote voting for all senators on a mandatory basis, including those present in person. It was considered necessary to prioritise equal voting conditions for all senators. The system of voting in person was deactivated.

Remote voting was used for all voting, regardless of the item on the agenda. A sufficient period of time was allowed for voting to ensure (1) that the subject of the vote was known, (2) that the vote was cast, (3) that it was received, (4) that it was counted and (5) that any technical problems arising from the voting process could be resolved.

Voting always took place once the debate on the corresponding issue had been concluded.

The Supplementary Rule became obsolete in October 2021 when all senators returned in person. However, a new Supplementary Rule was passed on 30 November 2021 with the (Omicron) sixth wave of the pandemic (which was also applied in plenary sessions where there were failures in the in-person voting system).

The system also allowed for ballot voting to elect members of bodies appointed by the Senate (such as the Board of Directors of the Public Radio and Television Corporation).

The third (and current) stage of remote voting: 2022.

In April 2022, and on the successful technical basis tested during the pandemic phase, Article 92 of the Senate Standing Orders was amended. Section 3 established the general rules for remote electronic voting:

- The senator makes the request with the supporting documentation and the Bureau gives its authorisation, if it fits in the Standing Orders requirements.
- The vote can be cast by this method for all items on the agenda (except those resolved by assent) and for any type of voting.
- Senators may submit a request for the following circumstances: "... pregnancy, maternity and paternity leave, or exceptional or unpredictable circumstances that may be sufficiently proved to prevent the senators from attending those sessions, such as accidents, health issues or attendance at international meetings".
- Remote votes are always cast once the debate on the corresponding issue has been concluded, within the time period allocated by the Speaker. At the end of this period, votes will be cast in person, at the time announced by the speaker. The voting system adds up the remote votes and those cast in person.

In addition to the above, the new Article 92(4) of the Standing Orders provides as follows: "In extraordinary events, such as catastrophes, disasters, health crises, suspension of essential public services for the community, as well as in those extraordinary events in which the normal parliamentary activity may not be held in the Senate Palace, or in which the in-person electronic vote procedure may not be used, the Speaker, in agreement with the Board of Spokespersons, may resolve that all senators cast their vote by the remote electronic procedure." Provision is made in the Standing Orders for cases such as those which gave rise to the above-mentioned Supplementary Rules.

Basic technical aspects of the system.

From a technical point of view, the application for remote electronic voting was developed by the Senate's ICT services. 7 Senators authorised to vote remotely can access the voting application from any computer, tablet or mobile phone. They have to enter the username and password.

When remote voting opens, senators must select "yes", "no" or "abstain" for each of the matters put to vote. They can review the options and when they want to cast their vote, they accept the selection and enter the OTR code received on their mobile phone. For now, this is how the system guarantees the "personal" nature of the vote. However, it is clearly not 100% guaranteed. The possibility of using facial recognition on mobile phones is being studied to give further assurance.

The votes are received by the Senate's computer systems and the application prepares them to be added to the in-person votes. Once the vote takes place in person, the results shown on the screens in the plenary hall and those published on the website reflect the votes cast in-person and those cast remotely.

For the moment, it is not technically possible to have remote voting and in-person voting at the same time. In-person voting needs to be held after remote voting, which

means that if there is a change of opinion in the way a political group votes, it is not possible for those who voted remotely to change their vote during this period of time.

In any case, the electronic system for in-person voting remains blocked for senators authorised to vote remotely. So the same MP cannot cast two votes.

Other considerations regarding remote voting.

Some remarks can be carried out on the circumstances allowing for remote voting:

a) Pregnancy, maternity or paternity leave: those at the origin of the remote voting rule in 2013, to balance parliamentary and family life. As this is a well-justified aim, the question is whether the MP in such a situation really does achieve balance, or whether they only do so to a very limited extent when voting remotely. Because when this kind of measures are taken to balance work and family life, workers generally take their leave in full, without any workload. Yet, MPs are required to exercise their right to vote during paternity or maternity leave, which involves following the session, preparatory work, etc. Being so, they are expected to do their work, limiting this balance.

b) In the cases of illness or accident: if the illness or accident is serious, is the MP in a position to follow the session and cast a vote? If not, does it prevent them from being in the chamber? And what if someone is going through surgery? 8

c) Attendance at international meetings: IPU Assembly, for example. Can someone participate in a committee or plenary meeting and cast a vote in the Senate? Maybe. But can they follow the debates in both forums?

d) The broadness of the formulation used in the Standing Orders (cases “... such as...”) opens the door to interpretations that may be overly flexible and potentially create problems.

In addition, the usual and logical parliamentary practice of extending the political negotiation of some of the issues to be voted on to immediately before the vote (amendments to laws, for example), involves delays in remote voting that affect the running of the agenda and sometimes require the suspension of the session to allow senators voting remotely sufficient time to have a proper understanding of the text of the matter to be voted on.

The remote voting system also entails rigidity in the in-person voting process that prevents or makes it extremely difficult, for example, to change the voting order of the amendments.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked the member for their presentation and invited questions from the floor.

Ms Claressa SURTEES (Australia) commented that she would be interested to know the reaction of MPs to these proposals. She said that remote voting had been

brought in to enable mothers to vote while they are not present in parliament. This is arranged via party whips who make the vote on their behalf.

During the pandemic, the parliament prepared rules and changes to enable remote voting but members did not want to use the new process to vote remotely. She said she was unsure of the reason why members had not wanted this facility but there had always been sufficient quorum in the parliament for a vote during the pandemic. She asked whether, in Spain, there was any reluctance from MPs about the remote voting mechanism?

Mr Mahmoud Etman (Egypt), informed colleagues that a system for remote voting has been put in place over 10 years ago in Egypt. He asked whether an evaluation had been carried out on the proposals to determine whether there would be any negative aspects?

Chloe Mawson (United Kingdom) commented that in the House of Lords there was a historic prohibition on remote voting but as a result of the pandemic remote voting was introduced and it was reliable and worked well. During the pandemic, even the Members who were present in the House of Lords chamber voted on the App. When the pandemic finished, the House of Lords decided to get rid of the remote voting process. However, a limited group were allowed to keep using the App (members who are seriously ill and who could not attend Parliament). A committee was setup to police use of this special system. Members wishing to use the system must apply to the committee, disclosing sensitive medical information, as evidence they meet the criteria for continued use of the remote voting App. She concluded by saying that this has been controversial.

Jose Pedro Montero, Vice President (Uruguay) informed the Association that in the Uruguayan Parliament they do not have this issue. When MPs are unable to go to the plenary they nominate a substitute to go to the plenary in their place. He asked what happens when a Minister or Head of Government is away, can a remote participant contribute to debate or make a speech?

Mr Ingvar MATTSON (Sweden) noted Mr Cavero's reflections on the lessons learnt from this experience and echoed the question of his Egyptian colleague. He said that in Sweden there is no opportunity to vote remotely. It was not introduced during the pandemic. He enquired about security issues and asked how the parliament can be sure it is indeed the Member who votes on the App? He asked whether there have been any suspicious outcomes from the remote votes?

Mr Daniel GUSPAN (Slovakia) asked whether, in case there is a dispute, if there is any formal body who is responsible for deciding if the request of an MP is rightful? If so, does the decision-making body consists of MPs or the secretariat?

Barbara Dithapo (Botswana) said that in Botswana they have also changed their standing orders to allow remote voting and that after the pandemic, they kept some of the rules in place. Members do have to be physically in Botswana, they are not allowed to vote from outside of the country. The House proceeds whenever it is quorate and it can vote whenever it is quorate.

****The meeting was suspended between 11.20 and 11.40 due to problems with the interpretation system ****

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, apologised to the Association for the technical problems with the interpretation services. He suggested that the Association launch into the small group discussion on ‘conflicts of interest’, to give the technical team more time to fix the problem.

**** The Association split into 5 language-based groups to discuss the general debate topic for 30 mins. The Association resumed at 12.10. ****

Mr Najib El Khadi, President apologising again for the technical problems and announced changes to the agenda as a result of the unexpected pause in proceedings. First, Mr Caverro would have the opportunity to respond to the excellent questions posed by the Association, then the result of the election would be announced and finally, Mr Gautam would have the opportunity to give his opening speech on the topic of the General Debate on ‘conflicts of interest.’

Mr Manuel Caverro (Spain) said in response to Clarissa that the remote voting system has been very popular amongst MPs because it helps them to balance family and social life with work. After the pandemic, there was a lot of pressure for reform to the standing orders to enable remote voting as quickly as possible and to have the circumstances clearly defined. In response to Egypt’s comment on the negative aspects, Mr Caverro said the main problem was the image it can project. Institutions have an important role as symbols, if the citizens have a perception that this symbol is gone, that MPs are not sitting and voting, this can have a negative impact on symbol and the country. If it starts at about 10% of Members voting remotely, then 20% of Members and then 50%, it will eventually lead to questions about the number of Members required and how much they are paid. Another problem is that remote voting makes every vote very rigid, they cannot re-arrange the order of votes to flexibly respond to events. Before this system, they could easily change the order of votes. He said they still have Members requesting more flexible rules within the remote voting system.

In response to the UK, he said the first draft of the standing order was changed in 2013 and the wording was ‘serious illness.’ It was for the secretariat to apply the rule. No medical expertise was initially taken to make the decision. Now, there must be a paper signed by a doctor to confirm that the illness prevents the Member coming to the city to vote. The bureau did have concerns about some of the requests. Spain does not check the validity of the paper signed by the doctor, there is trust.

In response to Uruguay, he said they do not operate a substitute or proxy vote system and there are no remote speeches, Members must come to the plenary to intervene orally. It was only ever remote voting in Spain, even during the height of the pandemic. In response to Sweden, he said that Members access the App with a username and password. Once they have chosen their vote, they receive a code in their mobile phone, to verify it is the Member who is casting the vote. They cannot guarantee that the phone is in the Members hands. They have discussed bringing in

facial recognition but there is reluctance from Members. Mr Cavero said he was not suspicious about the votes cast remotely. In 2013, he was unsure but the system with the text code is strong and they have not had any experience of hackers interfering with the votes. The ICT staff in the Spanish Senate are careful. There was an instance where some Members, who were flying on a plane, could not cast votes but this was a different problem.

In response to Slovenia, he said there have been no calls from Members about problems with the system. During the pandemic, there was a telephone number provided with the App offering support if there was a problem. A Member called the number immediately, before ever attempting to vote on the App, and now they do not provide a phone number. He thanked Botswana for sharing her experience. In response to Mr Mokadem, he said that if for any reason the person cannot vote remotely (eg. the signal internet drops) then this is the Member's problem and not in the hands of the Senate to solve this problem.



3. Concluding remarks

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, closed the sitting and reminded members that the session would recommence at 14.30.

He closed the sitting.

The sitting ended at 12.38

FIFTH SITTING

Tuesday 14 March 2023 (afternoon)

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, in the Chair

The sitting was opened at 2.34pm

1. Introductory remarks

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, welcomed everyone back and set out the amended agenda for the afternoon.

2. Update on developments at the Centre for Innovation in Parliament

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, welcomed Mr Andy Richardson to provide an update on the Centre for Innovation in Parliament.

Andy Richardson, IPU, said the World e-Parliament Report was launched in December 2022. It is available online in English, French, Spanish and Arabic at <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2022-11/world-e-parliament-report-2022>. The Report examines parliaments after the Covid-19 pandemic and concludes that parliaments have become more resilient and innovative. The Report makes five recommendations:

1. Carry out a formal inquiry to learn lessons from the pandemic and to prepare the parliament for the future:
2. Ensure that the legal framework, including the constitution, legislation and rules of procedure, is reviewed and, where necessary, amended with a focus on building the parliament's resilience to future emergencies.
3. Undertake a digital capability assessment and a review of business continuity planning.
4. Review and update the parliament's digital strategy/strategic plan to take account of the need for a more holistic and high-level approach to ICT, considering the overall trends in parliamentary ICT and the need to be prepared for future emergencies.
5. Delegate senior staff to participate in parliamentary knowledge exchanges, such as through the CIP, to learn from fellow parliaments and share experiences with peers

He encouraged Secretaries General to give full consideration to these recommendations. It is vital to continue to strengthen resilience so that parliaments are able to function in any circumstances.

He also briefed the ASGP on the communities of practice convened by IPU that deal with digital transformation and public engagement. Parliamentary staff from around the world are encouraged to join the regular webinars, share good practices and learn from the experiences of other parliaments. These online events will be complemented by an in-person World e-Parliament Conference in early 2024.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked Andy for his presentation and expressed the gratitude of the Association for the collaboration of the IPU on the project to create a 'Best practice guide on digitalisation'. He then invited questions from the floor.

Mr Masibulele XASO (South Africa) commented that South Africa's interaction with the e-Parliament panel was very helpful. He said there will always be two schools of thought, one that we should have hybrid proceedings as a minimum and the others who only want physical proceedings. In South Africa, hybrid was imposed due to Covid and then due to the fire affecting the parliament building. As a result, there is a permanent hybrid solution in South Africa. The benefit is that they never have problems with quorum, there are advantages for ill people and those with disabilities who can participate. He said the remote voting is controlled by the Whips and is not electronic. Now, in South Africa, hybrid is the very minimum, but they will always keep the hybrid facility in future. They also want to bring in electronic voting and they need to increase their I.T infrastructure to reflect this new reality.

Mr Ingvar MATTSON (Sweden) asked whether the e-Parliament project has looked at the serious security concerns and the issue of Government's collecting data for improper purposes. How do we tackle this issue?

Mr Naim COBAN (Türkiye), agreed with his colleagues on hybrid working, saying that his Secretary General is prioritising the issue. They were shocked by the pandemic but have now converted some things previously thought of as impossibilities to realities. He said that when it comes to project units and research units they can work remotely but IT infrastructure must be strengthened. Finding the balance between liberty and security is difficult and concluded that all must share their good practices.

Andy Richardson responded to Sweden saying that, yes, security is fundamental. In recent years the focus on this risk has come to the fore, geopolitical shifts and increased reliance have made it a very important issue. Tools and protections have to go hand in hand with development in this area. There is an intersection between the technical and political, the awareness of the threat and the technical capacity to prevent it and the political desire to invest in appropriate protections.

The IPU webinars are now public. In the past, the IPU has held private webinars on cyber and security issues and it may be something they scale up in future. In response to Turkey, he agreed with the comments about ensuring the I.T infrastructure is fully integrated into the overall strategic plan and business practices of the parliament. Digital is central to supporting the work of parliament. In the past, there were many different services of which digital was one. Now, it has to be a part of all the service.

General Debate: MPs and conflicts of interest

Dr Bharat Raj Gautam, Secretary General of the Federal State of Nepal, reminded members of the questions posed by the topic. What constitutes a conflict interest? Should MPs be able to work in other roles while also being parliamentarians? Which jobs add value to the work of parliamentarians? For example, should a politician who has a deeper understanding of the education system apply to sit on a committee which deals with this matter? What is the difference between valuable experience and a conflict of interest (particularly in the areas of banking and commerce)? Should a politician work as a lawyer, serving clients in front of the courts? What are the rules on second jobs for MPs? What are the rules for parliamentary staff and assistants? These are the questions we will discuss.

[The association split into 5 language specific groups to discuss]

Mr Éric JANSE (Canada), representing the first English speaking group, spoke as follows:

For the majority of parliaments in his group, there is a code which governs both MPs and staff. He said that sometimes parliamentarians could hold another job in addition to their parliamentary role – a liberal profession for example – but that parliamentary staff were generally not able to do so. He said that some parliaments had very specific rules governing conflicts of interest, and most parliamentarians were required to declare their interests publicly. In some parliaments, MPs could still vote on issues linked to their personal interests but in others this was not possible. He discussed the difficulties in defining what constitutes a conflict of interest, especially with regards to financial interests.

With regards to gifts given to parliamentarians, there exists different rules in parliaments on whether these should be declared or not, where they are declared and what the threshold should be (eg. 100 Euros or 200 Euros). He then described the registers on which some lobbyists are expected to be publicly listed in some parliaments.

He concluded that members in his group felt that new information should be placed on published lists of interests swiftly but that the quality of the information provided was often doubtful. The group felt that information provided should be verified, its conformity with the law checked and transparency with the public assured.

Ms Sarah Davies (United Kingdom), representing the second English speaking group, spoke as follows:

She commented that in her group no country had a total ban on outside work by MPs. However, the extent of restrictions on second jobs varied depending on the profession but there were always some jobs which might be excluded.

On transparency, the group had noted the level of interest in the information published about Members interests - from journalists and the wider public - and that current use of this public data indicates interest in MP's interests will only increase. She said that some parliaments expect members to make declarations during debates in order to ensure transparency.

She highlighted that the systems to register an interest differs between parliaments and is often separate to the register for Ministers interests. This is true in the UK. She remarked that in the group there were also significant differences in the level of detail required when registering interests and in the sanction mechanisms applied when MPs do not comply with registration requirements.

She highlighted an interesting example from Thailand where they have an anti-corruption commissioner who can investigate conflicts of interest. In the Netherlands, parliament has created a specific committee which is charged with determining whether parliamentarians should be excluded on the basis of their interests. Finally, she complimented colleagues from South Africa who summed up a key challenge in that systems for preventing conflicts of interest must be robust and also compatible with each other. For officials, there are differences in the rules but the essential principle remains that any activities undertaken must not impinge on their parliamentary work.

Mr Omar AL NUAIMI (UAE), representing the Arabic speaking group, spoke as follows:

Commenced by saying that long discussions had taken place within the group on the definition of a conflict of interest. The group had agreed the following definition: parliamentarians must not have personal interests in decisions which are engaged in voting on in parliament. Most Arab parliaments have rules which governing conflicts of interest in law which require parliamentarians to declare their interests.

In Egypt, when MPs are debating an issue they must declare if they have a personal vested interest in the question, at personal or family level, and in some cases must withdraw from the debate. In Algeria, elected members must be fully committed to parliamentary work and cannot mix this with other jobs or employment (whether public, private or professional). Furthermore, parliamentarians cannot participate in committees of enquiry which concern their region.

Finally, they was great discussion on the procedure for managing conflicts of interest. They agreed that this cannot be entirely abolished by texts of law as conflicts of interest also depend on the morality of individuals.

Mr Jean MUKUALA BATEKE (Congo), representing the French speaking group, spoke as follows:

In his group, most parliaments allowed elected members to exercise other activities outside of the parliamentary role. In particular, the liberal profession such as doctor or lawyer were commonly accepted. He added that in most countries there are strict rules about the types of employment considered incompatible with the mandate of an elected member. In many cases this was determined by the constitutional court. Limits are set out in the rules of the Assembly and often included an obligation on elected members to declare interests over the course of their mandate.

The group agreed that parliamentary staff may also find themselves in situation of conflict of interest. In general, if an activity is incompatible with a role the elected member is expected to undertake and would put the member in a conflict of interest they should withdraw from this responsibility. The groups also discussed rules derived from codes of conduct, manuals of good practice and practices which have developed over the lifetime of parliaments.

Mr Manuel Cavero, representing the Hispanic group, spoke as follows:

In general, they concluded that no jobs add value to the work of an MP. Most standing Orders and rules prevent second job activity, there are rare exceptions, but in general there is a full system of incompatibilities.

In some countries, conflicts of interests are overseen internally by special committees whereas in others monitoring is undertaken by an external body or organisations. For example, the Portuguese Constitutional Court has a say on the declaration of interests made by MPs in the parliament and can even go to court.

Jobs which can be combined with the parliamentary role are generally public service roles, as is the case in Uruguay and Mozambique. Whenever MPs do have a second activity it is always part-time. Teaching is most common in Hispanic countries, in some other's professions such as lawyer and doctor are permissible, but always with restrictions. On the side of conflicts of interest, Mozambique defined it as allowing an interest whilst passing laws. In Timor Leste there is a law on preventing corruption. High ranking staff of the parliament must also declare interests.

Dr Bharat Raj Gautam (Nepal) concluded the debate by stating that the topic is very big and cannot be conclude in one or two sentences. Certain systems are flexible, others more restrictive, and members could simply to borrow ideas from these different political systems.

He commented that each rapporteurs presentation was interesting and helped to build understanding about conflicts of interest by MPs and senior members of parliament. There were some common points, being an MP is a high position with a great impact on the public domain and there is a fundamental issue of ethics and morals. Accountability and transparency is therefore very important and means interests must be declared. Laws and rules on conflicts of interest are important from the ethical point of view. The obligations of public office must not to be associated

with a conflict of interest, the first job is the service of the parliament and parliamentarians must not misuse the role.

Theme: The role of parliaments in combatting climate change

3. Communication: Mr Ahmed Manna, Secretary General of Egyptian House of Representatives, on 'The role of parliaments in combatting climate change'

Mr Ahmed Manna, Secretary General of Egyptian House of Representatives, spoke as follows:

His Excellency Dr. Najib El Khadi
President of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments
Honourable colleagues,

At the beginning, I would like to express my great appreciation for your kind invitation to me to participate in this important meeting of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, which is an important platform in the framework of the InterParliamentary Union aiming to consultation and coordination between the general secretaries of national parliaments and the exchange of legal and technical expertise, in a way that contributes to improving the performance of national parliaments and their work, besides to achieving more joint cooperation among them, to meet the demands and aspirations of our peoples.

Allow me to commend the great role played by the Association in order to support and develop mechanisms of cooperation and joint action among the general secretariats of national parliaments, in a way that contributes to benefiting from common experiences and strengthening the capabilities of their workers, for the sake of the development and advancement of international parliamentary work.

Honourable ladies and gentlemen,

We are meeting today under global conditions that carry with them accelerating political and economic challenges, which have forced the legislative councils to face and manage them with a high level of efficiency and professionalism. At the forefront of these challenges is what the world has been facing for years of severe climate fluctuations due to the "Global warming" crisis, that increased the emissions of harmful gases into the atmosphere. However, the repercussions and implications of this crisis are constantly increasing, which threatens the sustainability of natural resources, especially nonrenewable ones, as well as the future of most living organisms on earth due to natural disasters and spread of diseases and epidemics resulting from them.

There is no doubt that the issue of climate change has become a concern for the whole world, and a lot of efforts have been made to confront it at the national, regional and international levels. Many conferences have been held to discuss ways to confront it, the most recent of which was the 27th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in the Egyptian city of Sharm el-Sheikh in last November.

The conference witnessed broad parliamentary participation, represented in the international parliamentary meeting that was held on the side-lines of COP27 in

cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union on November 13th, 2022. It brought together parliamentary delegations from more than 60 countries as well as many regional, international and parliamentary organizations in addition to a number of international high-level personalities. Extensive discussions took place on ways to support international efforts to confront climate change, reduce global warming and work to activate the role of parliamentary diplomacy in this regard.

Mr. President,

Parliaments have to play a pivotal role in confronting climate change which threaten the future of the entire world and contribute to the development of environmental policies and legislations to mitigate climate change, develop the capabilities of new and clean energy and present incentives to encourage the transformation towards green economy in a way that would contribute to achieving sustainable development.

Therefore, The Senate of Egypt had tackled twice the climate change and its effect on the environment: the first time was before COP27 last November, and the second was after the conference and discussed its outcome. The Senate called the members for the need of taking necessary measures to mitigate the effects of climate changes under the presiding role of Egypt to the summit this year until the handing of its presidency to United Arab Emirates. Moreover, The Senate discusses at the present time a comparative study of Carbon market and Carbon tax in order to shed the light on this critical part; as Carbon has effects on environment and climate change.

On the other hand, parliaments possess oversight tools that enable them to hold executive bodies accountable and monitor their compliance with environmental policies. Parliaments can hold public hearings and invite government officials to testify before the concerned committees and demand to rectify shortcomings in the performance of the executive bodies. The Parliament can also play an active role in confronting climate change through its competence to discuss and approve the state budget as well as its oversight over various objects of expenditure. Thus, the parliament can allocate a certain percentage of this budget to develop clean energy sectors, replace polluting sectors, set specific incentives to reduce the negative effects of climate change and adopt approaches that would reduce greenhouse emissions. By means of these budget allocations, the parliament could enhance capacity-building in terms of adapting to climate change, preserving natural resources and green areas, developing infrastructure to face the effects of climate change as well as tools for disaster risk reduction and promoting scientific research and technology transfer.

Mr. President,

The recent years have revealed that the universal conventions pertaining to climate changes won't achieve its desired goals unless national decision makers realize the seriousness of the problem and the necessity of everyone's cooperation in order to be able to confront it; as we live in one planet with a common destiny. This is when the role of national parliaments becomes prominent concerning the approval of these treaties; which provide a major boost of confronting climate change in the coming years by inserting them in national legislations, confirming parliaments' commitment to these treaties' provisions and creating some kind of national

consensus among governmental institutions, effective parties, civil society organizations, business owners and all concerned stakeholders.

We now need -more than ever- to activate the mechanisms of international work and solidarity to face climate change threats and mitigate its catastrophic effects. The parliamentary diplomacy should play a crucial role in this context. Besides, it is beyond doubt that the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments is one of the effective parliamentary platforms in the context of international parliamentary union for dialogue, joint coordination and exchange of experiences among secretaries generals of national parliaments, which contribute to enhancing the parliaments' capabilities in confronting this crisis and other crises that face our contemporary world. At the conclusion of my speech, I'm grateful for your listening and I'm confident that our meeting will achieve the desired goals and aims, specially with the participation of this distinguished elite of secretaries generals who have a long history in institutional parliamentary work.

With my sincere wishes of health and well-being for you, and I hope for your people the continuous progress and prosperity.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked the member for their presentation.

4. Communication: Mr Rajit Punhani, Secretary to Rajya Sabha of India, on 'Combatting climate change'

Mr Rajit Punhani, Secretary to Rajya Sabha of India, spoke as follows:

I. Introduction

Climate change has already made its mark on every part of the world, including India. It poses a key threat to sustainable development. If proactive measures to adapt and reduce the impacts of climate change are not taken, it has the potential to further exacerbate vulnerabilities. India is among those nations which are most susceptible to the effects of climate change. In fact, climate change has already begun to affect India in several ways, such as water stress, heat waves and drought, severe storms and flooding and its deleterious consequences on human health, wildlife, food production and the economy as a whole.

II. India – A Key Player in Climate Action

India has a crucial role to play in the fight against climate change, not only because the country experiences the worst of its effects, but also because it is one of the largest and most rapidly expanding economies in the world. Additionally, with almost a fifth of the world's population, India's success in tackling climate change can have far reaching consequences for the rest of the planet. India has become a focal point in the global push for cleaner energy and it is increasingly seen as the next frontier in the transition towards renewable energy.

As we stand witness to the severe consequences of climate change, it is

imperative to take urgent collective action to combat it. Although individual actions, such as using reusable items, conserving energy and minimizing waste are crucial, we must also acknowledge the vital role that Governments and Parliaments worldwide play in addressing this global emergency, both individually and collectively. In this communication, besides touching upon the role of Governments in general and Indian Government in particular, the role of Parliaments in the formulation of the country's climate action has been discussed.

III. Role of Government in Tackling Climate Change

It is widely acknowledged that Governments play a vital role in addressing climate change by implementing policies to decrease greenhouse gas emissions, endorsing sustainable land use practices and promoting renewable energy sources. Governments can also contribute to global climate change negotiations and establish a framework for combating climate change while raising awareness and educating the public to generate support for action. Additionally, Governments can promote climate change education through public awareness and by incorporating it into school curriculums.

The Indian Government acknowledges the significant role the country can play in addressing the worldwide crisis of climate change and as such has been proactively implementing measures to combat it. The country aims to achieve 500 Giga Watt of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030, reduce the total projected carbon emission by an additional one billion tones, reduce the carbon intensity of the economy by less than 45 per cent, fulfil 50 per cent of energy requirements through renewable waste by 2030, and achieve net zero emissions by 2070. ¹ These objectives demonstrate India's sincerity in tackling climate change, although they are challenges and ambitious.

IV. Adaptation and Mitigation Responses by Indian Government to Tackle Climate Change

India's updated Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC), submitted to the UNFCCC in August 2022 further reaffirms our commitment to work towards a low carbon emission pathway. The Indian Government has established ambitious goals to decrease the country's greenhouse gas emissions intensity by 33-35 per cent by 2030 in comparison to 2005 levels. Moreover, the Government aims to achieve 40 per cent of its installed electricity capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030 and to expand its forest coverage to 33 per cent of its overall land area. No doubt these targets are ambitious and formidable, nevertheless, India has already made significant strides towards transitioning to a green economy. The Indian Government has implemented various initiatives in recent years to transform its economy and adopt low carbon development path. The country is rapidly increasing its use of renewable energy sources like wind, solar and hydro power. As is evident, India already has numerous policy measures in place that could accelerate the shift to cleaner and more efficient technologies. In 2021, India was ranked fourth in the world in terms of installed renewable energy capacity.² The country is implementing measures to adapt to the impacts of climate change, such as developing climate-resilient infrastructure and promoting sustainable agriculture

practices.

The Indian Government has been actively participating in international climate negotiations as well and has committed to working with other countries to address climate change. India is also a member of the International Solar Alliance, which aims to promote solar energy deployment. The Government's "LiFE" movement calling climate-friendly behaviors among individuals, communities and organisations has the potential to make a big difference.

V. Parliamentary Action on Climate Change

While the Executive does its part, Parliaments around the world also have its task cut out for combating the serious threat of climate change. Their role is also central to any successful strategy to tackle climate change.

Firstly, Parliaments play a vital role in combating climate change by developing policies and laws that promote sustainable development, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and encourage the transition towards renewable energy. Secondly, their oversight role requires them to seek Government assurances on matters of critical development or climate concerns on the floor of the House, raising issues or asking for special discussions pertaining to country's planned trajectory for green economy or attainment of SDG. In addition to policy-making, they can assess the effectiveness of Government policies and programs in addressing climate change and ensure that the necessary resources are allocated towards the implementation of these initiatives, both aspects being important in ensuring a country's response and resilience to climate change.

Thirdly, Parliamentarians can also raise awareness and educate citizens about the impacts of climate change and the steps they can take to contribute to a sustainable future. They can engage with various stakeholders such as NGOs, businesses, and academic institutions to collaborate on sustainable initiatives that benefit both the environment and the economy. It is the duty of legislators to generate awareness among their constituents regarding the varied development initiatives taken by the Government for ensuring their overall progress particularly to ease the brunt of climate change and global warming.

VI. Role of Indian Parliament in Combating Climate Change

Reinforcing India's commitment to the national development agenda and to propel the implementation of the SDGs, the Indian Parliament has been playing a crucial role in combating climate change by formulating legislations that promote sustainable development and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It has enacted several laws that promote the use of clean energy, such as solar and wind power and provide incentives for businesses and individuals to invest in renewable energy sources. ³ The Parliament has strengthened environmental protection laws and regulations to protect ecosystems and biodiversity. Usually it is the Government that proposes legislation, but in the Indian Parliament, Members have also brought Private Members' Legislation to deal with environmental issues.

The procedure of parliamentary questions has also been extensively used by Members to elicit information about Government actions to deal with environmental

problems. Parliamentary questions have often been concerned about the impacts of climate change on agriculture, coastal areas and health and mitigation issues related to energy, agriculture and aviation.

The issue of climate change and related issues have also been discussed extensively in our Parliament. Our Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committees on Science & Technology, Environment & Forests 6 has provided recommendations on policies related to air pollution, water pollution, waste management, and biodiversity conservation, among other issues and has helped to strengthen environmental governance in India by providing recommendations on laws and regulations related to environmental protection. Likewise, Committee on Energy has been instrumental in promoting the development and use of renewable energy in India. It has provided recommendations on policies and programs related to renewable energy, such as the National Solar Mission, and helped to shape the country's energy transition.

Indian Parliament has been taking steps to encourage international cooperation on climate change by participating in global climate negotiations, sharing knowledge and expertise with other countries and collaborating on research and development on research and development of clean energy technologies.

VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is not only the responsibility of every individual and Government to the fight against climate change, Parliaments also have a significant role to play in addressing this global crisis. In recent years, the Indian Government has taken several steps to address climate change, which have helped to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move towards a low carbon economy. The Government has made commitments to mitigate climate change and the current G20 Presidency provides an opportunity to further advance global climate action and find lasting solutions to the vexed issue.

They have the power to enact legislations and enforce policies, hold Governments accountable, raise awareness, and promote global cooperation towards achieving a sustainable future. Overall, the Indian Parliament has been playing a significant role in combating climate change. However, there still room for further raising the level of parliamentary debate on climate change.

While the efforts of individual Parliaments remains critical to achieve effective action, it is essential that Parliaments work together on a global level to develop unified policies and strategies that address the root causes of climate change. International cooperation is crucial in mitigating climate change, and Parliaments can play an essential role in facilitating such cooperation.

We need to work together with our Parliaments towards building a more resilient and sustainable planet.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked the member for their presentation.

5. Communication: Mr Abdullah Al-Masry Al-Fadil, Secretary General of the Libyan Parliament on ‘Combatting climate change’

Mr Abdullah Al-Masry Al-Fadil, Secretary General of the Libyan Parliament, spoke as follows:

Excellences, Members of the General Secretaries Association of National Parliaments, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Attendance May the peace, blessings, and mercy of God be upon you

At the beginning of my intervention, I would like to express my thanks to you for giving me the opportunity to present my intervention, which includes a pivotal and important topic that poses a direct threat to humanity in the continuation of life. Climate change has become the most important and urgent global issue that has crossed borders and is now facing all of humanity and is getting deeper day by day than ever before.

Accordingly, climate justice and intergenerational equity should be central to achieving all our national goals and aspirations. Realizing that the environmental issue has implications for all social, economic and security policies, and the issue of combating climate change requires a great deal of long-term planning to access the information and data that parliaments need due to its impact on the living environment, human health, prosperity and water availability. And food security, migration, urban growth, and poor and marginalized groups. Therefore, the matter requires the development of appropriate measures and mechanisms and the formation of policy frameworks that enhance the role of parliaments to contribute to combating climate change.

Accordingly, we see that the task of parliaments in combating climate change lies in the implementation of their legislative, oversight, and representative roles, and budgets start from facing the challenges that affect the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in general because there is a close relationship between them. In this, parliaments can contribute to combating climate change through the following: Parliaments should be an essential part of the process of developing strategies from the outset, and not in the stages of adopting legislation supporting combating climate change. Follow-up on the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the decisions of previous sessions and their results for the Conference of the Parties to this agreement and the obligations and pledges resulting from that.

Supporting climate-related legislative processes to achieve the goals of sustainable development in all its dimensions, effectively and in support of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. Holding governments accountable for their national, regional and international commitments on climate change through the development of mechanisms to ensure effective oversight and accountability. Enhancing the role of parliaments in particular towards proposing, reviewing, amending and monitoring the effective implementation of climate legislation. Engage parliaments in efforts to

mobilize and expand the necessary climate finance to ensure that sufficient funding is allocated in national budgets and spent effectively to enhance action towards the effects of climate change to advance towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Enabling parliamentary committees to contribute to preparing studies, reviewing climate legislative policies, and providing opinions to ensure integrated decision-making processes Parliaments can strengthen the legislative response at the national level and align it with international agreements and treaties related to climate action. Activating the representative role of parliamentarians by involving their constituencies in discussions and consultations on the grounds that they are the real stakeholders, reviewing relevant national plans, identifying gaps and weaknesses and their impact at the national and international levels.

Work to activate the role of civil society organizations, academic organizations, and regional and international institutions to confront waste transport crimes that affected the climate by setting legal rules and international mechanisms regarding forcing countries to respect the environment and human life. Parliaments carry out the task of political pressure by evaluating the climate impact of all legislation to increase the optimal use of clean and renewable energy technology. Existence of strong parliamentary cooperation to find international solutions that ensure that all countries are able to face the inevitable challenges Parliaments can play their role in developing policies that allow adaptation and mitigation to withstand climate change by creating a development vision for a healthy environment that encourages reducing the risks of environmental pollution. Achieving the oversight role and accountability with regard to the implementation of relevant national laws and plans and regional and international agreements When approving and approving budgets, taking into account the various aspects of sectors, institutions and state structures in order to achieve the goals of sustainable development 2030 in general and the goal related to climate change in particular.

In conclusion, and out of keenness of the Libyan House of Representatives to combat climate change, it formed a committee specialized in supervising support for the United Nations emergency agreement on climate change, leading local efforts and initiatives to mitigate and adapt to it, reviewing and expressing institutional opinion on its programs and projects, and cooperating and coordinating with existing local, regional and global efforts and initiatives and ensuring the participation of all relevant parties Thank you for listening, I wish our meeting every success

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked the member for their presentation.

6. Communication: Mr Naim ÇOBAN, Deputy Secretary General of Grand National Assembly of Türkiye on ‘Green parliaments’

Mr Naim ÇOBAN, Deputy Secretary General of Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, spoke as follows:

GREEN ASSEMBLY

Measures Taken to Protect Nature and the Green

- The use of electric vehicles has increased, and currently 10 electric vehicles are in use in our Green Assembly, contributing to the reduction of carbon emission.
- More weight is given to the aromatic plants grown by us in our greenhouses, which helps to save irrigation water and contributes to the ecosystem in the garden of the Assembly.
- The nuts of the oaks in the garden of GNAT are picked up every year and delivered to the authorities concerned. In this way, the oaknuts of the parliament spring to life and contribute to the green world and environment in different places.
- The use of plastic glasses, forks and spoons has been restricted within the Parliament, minimizing the use of plastic products.
- We feed our non-human friends such as cats, dogs, and squirrels on the campus of GNAT.
- Zero Waste Project and Its Implementation in the GNAT
- Non- hazardous waste (paper, plastic, glass, metal) is segregated in our Assembly within the scope of the Zero Waste projects, contributing to the environment.
- Hazardous waste (fluorescence, toner, waste mineral oil, auto parts, etc.) is collected separately and delivered to licensed companies within the scope of Zero Waste project again; thus, potential negative effects of such waste are prevented.
- Source-separated waste is taken to the Temporary Waste Storage Area, and then it is delivered to the companies that have the environmental permit.

The waste in the kitchens and tea houses inside the GNAT is collected separately and taken to the Temporary storage area, where it is turned into Compost (organic fertilizer).

The organic waste is turned into compost and used by the Department of Park and Garden Services to improve the soil quality in different places. Thus, we both contribute to the environment and prevent the waste of resources.

- The waste cooking oil in the kitchens of our Assembly is collected separately and delivered to licensed companies. Thus, we help to prevent water and soil pollution.
- Waste batteries are collected separately through the waste battery collection containers placed on the floors on the GNAT. Thus, we help to prevent environmental pollution to a significant extent.
- Zero Waste Project of the GNAT is carried out sensitively. Thus, we prevent the waste of resources and promote resource efficiency.
- Within the scope of the Waste Management Policy of GNAT;
- 250 tons of paper have been recycled since 2018, saving 4000 trees.
- By the end of 2022, our Zero Waste data were as follows:
- 27 tons of plastic were recycled, saving 435 barrels of fuel.
- 22 tons of metal waste were recycled, saving approximately 29 tons of raw materials.
- 211 kgs of batteries were collected, preventing the pollution of approximately 14 million tons of water and 70 decarees of soil.
- 1.250 kgs of organic waste were turned into 350 kgs of organic fertilizer through the organic waste composting machine.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked the member for their presentation.

7. Communication: His Excellency Dr Omar Al Nuaimi, Secretary General of the Federal National Council, UAE, on 'The role of parliaments in combatting climate change'

Dr Omar Al Nuaimi, Secretary General of the Federal National Council, spoke as follows:

Statement of His Excellency Dr. Omar Abdulrahman Al Nuaimi, Secretary-General to the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments Meeting,

His Excellency Mr. Najib El Khadi, President of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments,

Our Colleagues

Secretaries General of Parliaments,

At the outset, I would like to extend my respect and appreciation for the role played by the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, which constitutes an influential working area and a forum for the Secretaries General of Parliaments to exchange views and expertise on the most significant issues of parliamentary works.

The Association chose the topic of "The Role of Parliaments in Combating Climate Change" being one of the most critical problems that need deeper consideration, as climate change has become the main issue that will control the destiny of humanity over the upcoming decades, especially in light of the negative and increasing effects of global warming and ensuing massive floods, drought or semi-drought of many rivers worldwide, prolonged and renewed wildfires, and losses in agricultural and fish sectors, as well as the impact on international food security. Accordingly, considering the role of parliaments in combating climate change is an urgent and essential matter for the works of parliaments, whether in terms of legislative or control works or parliamentary diplomacy works.

In this regard, I would like to stress on some critical points, which will determine the success of the role of parliaments in combating climate change.

First: The parliaments will not be able to combat this phenomenon without effective cooperation with the executive authorities, as confronting this problem is not only related to the adoption of regulated legislation to reduce the negative Statement of His Excellency Dr. Omar Abdulrahman Al Nuaimi, Secretary-General to the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments Meeting 2 effects of global warming, governments must have a strong political will to implement legislative obligations. What supports this is the fact that Paris Agreement and other international conventions that recognize the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions have not been adhered to as expected. This was due to the differences between countries regarding their implementation paths or adapting to the local environment to cope with these international obligations.

Second: The reduction of greenhouse gases requires global funding, which may exceed a trillion dollars, and this figure may double if this phenomenon is not confronted in the next few years. In addition to the need to compensate developing countries that are not responsible for more than 1% of the world's planet-warming gases. Despite the agreement in "Cop 27" that was held in Cairo to establish a fund to provide the necessary financing to combat climate change, the global political administrations were not effective enough to meet the financial commitments estimated to confront the phenomenon.

Hence, parliaments have a primary responsibility to urge their governments, through their oversight roles, to fulfill the commitments of the "Cop 27" held in Cairo, in addition to taking measures to compensate developing countries for the losses and damages of global warming. Parliaments, within the framework of their oversight roles, must review government environmental parliamentary reports regarding the evaluation of their public policies, and the extent of their success in limiting the effects of this phenomenon. So that there can be an effective and transparent evaluation in the "COP 28" that will be held in the United Arab Emirates next November. Statement of His Excellency Dr. Omar Abdulrahman Al Nuaimi, Secretary-General to the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments Meeting 3

Third: It is also important that the oversight role in parliaments has a major influence on the general government policies and that the environmental dimension is considered in these policies. Environmental policies are no longer a luxury that can be postponed for reasons of citizens' basic needs policies. Rather, they have become the engine that drives other policies in the areas of housing, infrastructure, transportation, health, industry, agriculture, and other public policies. Parliaments can emphasize the importance and need for environmental policies to be a major component in all other areas of public policies through their oversight tools, in order to maintain a safe future for the coming generations.

Fourth: In the process of discussing and approving public budgets and final accounts during their presentation to parliaments, it is necessary to emphasize the provision of the necessary financial resources to combat global warming and limit harmful environmental activities, and to adopt a kind of qualitative budget allocated to confront such phenomenon.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Perhaps these points that I have raised have been implemented by the policy of the United Arab Emirates voluntarily and deliberately, in order to achieve the goals of sustainable development and confront the negative effects of climate change. The success of the UAE in its specific policies to confront this phenomenon has gained the country the confidence of the countries to host the twenty-eighth session of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is to be held in November this year, Statement of His Excellency Dr. Omar Abdulrahman Al Nuaimi, Secretary-General to the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments Meeting 4

This conference is an exceptional opportunity to build partnerships and ensure inclusiveness, in order to achieve harmonization between sustainable development and climate action. It will also be a unique event as the conference will witness the

completion of the first global outcome to assess the progress in implementing the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement.

The UAE is also working on building a future vision to combat this phenomenon under its current effective leadership, such as the strategic initiative to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 AD, which is the first initiative in the Middle East and North Africa region. It reflects the keenness of the country's leadership to develop an approach that balances the present and the future, to achieve sustainable economic growth, in addition to providing a role model to ensure a better future for the coming generations. Although the UAE is a major provider of energy in the world, oil and gas in the UAE are among the least carbon-intensive types, and this achievement was reached through the State's implementation of pioneering technologies supporting the energy sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates works closely with the government of the country in its support to address the phenomenon of climate change, as the Council approved many legislations regulating environmental affairs, which has enforced integrated legislative system all over the environmental Statement of His Excellency Dr. Omar Abdulrahman Al Nuaimi, Secretary-General to the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments Meeting 5 sectors, whether in agriculture, industry, clean energy or encouraging scientific research.

The Federal National Council also monitors general environmental policies and made constructive recommendations in this regard that the government worked to implement, which had a positive and effective impact on reducing the consequences of the climate change phenomenon. Also, the Council stresses the success of the cooperation between the legislative and executive authorities in the UAE in protecting the citizens from environmental damage and complying with international commitments.

The country's hosting the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 28) has led to intensified national initiatives, in cooperation with many countries of the world, in order to ensure a sustainable, low-carbon future. The Conference has contributed to the exchange of information and technology, increasing the expenditure on scientific research, taking guaranteed measures, and proposing effective solutions in this regard.

Thank you all for listening.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked the member for their presentation.

8. Communication: Ms Silvia Claudia Milhacea, Secretary General of the Chamber of Deputies of Romania, on the topic of climate change.

Ms Silvia Claudia Milhacea, Secretary General of the Chamber of Deputies of Romania spoke as follows:

Dear Mr. President, Distinguished colleagues, Ladies and gentlemen,

The Palace of the Parliament is one of the biggest administrative buildings in the world and the biggest in Romania, hosting the offices of the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate, the Legislative Council and the Constitutional Court.

In addition, the first levels of the building consist of halls that are mainly used for international conferences, exhibitions and other large events of private companies.

As you may imagine in such a large building, the electricity consumption has been a major cost concern, reason for which starting with 2005, an electricity efficiency project has been implemented with the view to modernize the interior and exterior lighting.

As a public recognition of energy efficiency performances, several awards were achieved, including the 2008 Green Light Award.

More recently, the conventional light bulbs were replaced by LED lights.

Besides using efficient light sources, a complex Building Management System that adapts the light scenarios according to the specific needs and solarization was implemented.

All these measures were consistently reflected in the budget with yearly savings amounting up to 800.000 Euro. In terms of energy saving impact, the CO₂ reduction potential is of 2072 tons of CO₂/year.

The independent energy production and distribution in the building is also a major objective for our green strategy. We target our own energy production from renewable or alternative sources.

In this view, a feasibility study was carried out last year and the proposed solution is to expand the local heating and domestic hot water preparation system, by installing and connecting a high-efficiency trigeneration plant.

Dear colleagues,

I know that it is hard to believe but the efficiency of the measures implemented by our institution resulted in an electric consumption per square meter slightly higher than that of an average apartment, respectively 2.73 Kwh/sqm / month compared to 2.25 Kwh/sqm / month.

Pollution, waste reduction measures, and the enabling of re-use and recycling are also areas of interest in the maintenance process. Therefore, all the electronic equipment and used light sources are specially treated and follow the recycling procedure, in partnership with relevant NGO's.

In line with the objectives of creating a Green parliament, we have taken important steps towards a more digital administration, in this regard I would like to mention a

project co-financed by the European Social Fund, through which we simplified of our procedures in relation with the citizens. This was achieved through a digital platform which simplifies the administrative work, reduces the amount of the paper required. For the citizens, the savings are also important in terms of transportation cost and time.

Most of these efforts reflects the need to reduce the consumption in order to meet the environmental goals and thus to reduce the environmental footprint of such a large building as the Palace of the Parliament in Romania.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked all the members for their presentations and invited questions from the floor.

Mr Rui COSTA (Portugal) noted that this issue is of concern to the Portuguese Parliament and a set of concrete measures to reduce the impact of parliamentary activity on the environment is underway. The President signed a document recognising the responsibility of the parliament for achieving Carbon neutrality by 2025.

Mr Philippe DELIVET (France) focussed his comments on the efforts that Parliaments should make to reduce their energy usage. In 2020, the French Senate fixed a target of 2040 to reach carbon neutrality via modernisation of heating and lighting system, improved insulation, better energy management, securing renewable energy contracts and taking into account environmental criteria for public procurement. The strategy also includes remote working to reduce transportation, improving waste management and preserving biodiversity in the Luxembourg gardens. He concluded by saying this was not an exhaustive list of actions but did demonstrate that parliaments can act at the level of the administration and that the French Senate is resolutely committed to this goal.

Ms Claressa Surtees (Australia) noted a common theme of cooperation which leads to greater achievements in terms of climate change. She was drawn to the presentations from Turkey and Romania because of the practical aspects of the detail on solar measures, digital applications, recycling measures and reflected on the addition of gardens with flora and fauna. She said these presentations demonstrate the importance of leadership and setting out concrete actions.

M. Mahmoud ETMAN (Egypt) raised the introduction of a carbon taxation system in which countries which produce higher emissions must pay a carbon tax and those which produce less are able to sell 'carbon credits' and energy.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, said we are here to share best practices and there are many things we have learnt today which could be interesting for us all. This afternoon has offered us the possibility to learn new things. The ecological discussion today reflects the new generation of reforms which all parliaments should be involved in bringing about. It is extremely important to have this debate in the Association, to encourage Secretary General and Parliaments to introduce good practices by being inspired by the good practices of others.

9. Concluding Remarks

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked colleagues for an excellent discussion and reminded them to return at 10am the following day.

The meeting concluded at 4.50pm.

SIXTH SITTING

Wednesday 15 March 2023 (morning)

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, in the Chair

The sitting was opened at 10.05am

1. Introductory remarks

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, welcomed everyone back to the sixth and final sitting of the ASGP. He recalled the agenda for the day, presentations updating the Association on the project to create a guide on digitalisation and to introduce a new project on welcoming new Members of parliament.

2. Presentation: Questionnaire to create a best practice guide for ‘Digital Parliaments’

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, reminded members that the aim of the guide project is to provide a useful toolkit for secretaries general on the digitalisation of parliaments, by sharing good practices which have been developed in member parliaments. He recalled that the Executive Committee decided to launch this project a year ago. He underlined that digital tools and skills have become essential for all parliaments, and for secretaries general in particular, digitalisation now underpins the work of parliaments from the legislative process and security to engagement with citizens.

He remarked that this project fits neatly with prior work of the IPU on the ‘digital parliament’ and that the objective is to create a practical tool which is useful for secretaries general and parliamentary administrations.

With regard to the timetable, he reminded members that in Nusa Dua, in March 2022, the Executive Committee approved the decision to circulate a questionnaire on this issue and the Centre for Innovation in Parliament offered to collaborate with the ASGP to produce a guide which drawn on the survey responses.

He explained that a working group of secretary generals (notably from South Africa, Thailand, Uruguay, Hungary and India) had met online to approve each step towards producing the initial questionnaire and subsequent guide.

The questionnaire consisted of 22 questions on the following themes; strategy, governance and management, digital infrastructure, data security, public participation and databases. The text of the questionnaire was approved by the Association at the meeting in Kigali, in October 2022, then sent to all members of the Association. At the elapse of the deadline, 52 parliaments responded to the questionnaire which demonstrates the significant interest in both the project and the subject matter.

The working group then reviewed and approved the draft plan for a report which was produced, in collaboration with the CIP, on the basis of the survey responses. The objective is for the published guide to be ready by the Autumn conference in 2023.

Mr Andy Richardson also emphasised the aim of the project is to create a guide of practical use to secretaries general and highlighted that the draft plan for the report is available on the ASGP website, he welcomed feedback from members.

He defined digital transformation as applying digital tools to parliamentary procedures to improve the services that parliament's can offer and improve efficiency. He said users can be parliamentarians, the secretariat or the public more broadly. He underlined that digital transformation is not an event but a process of continual development. Parliaments around the world are all at different stages in the process, some parliaments are very digitally advanced whereas other parliaments are just beginning their journey. The human resources to support digital development are also very variable.

He then briefly presented the proposed structure for the guide and thanked all parliaments who had responded to the questionnaire. The Guide will have an introductory text, describing core components of what digitalisation involves then will go on to describe the institutional steps (risks and challenges), project planning, the role of Members, Secretaries General and the governance bodies who will manage and lead the projects. There will also be practical tools to assess where a parliament is in the digitalisation process, where to go next and a roadmap for achieving aims. The Guide is intended to be a common framework for all parliaments in their journey towards digitalisation.

He confirmed that the IPU team is still in the research stage, so any parliament who wishes to share good practices and problems should get in touch.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked Andy for his words and invited questions from the floor.

Ms Sarah Davies (United Kingdom) remarked that this is an area of work where it is very helpful for parliaments to share best practice, especially in the context of the rapid developments which occurred during the pandemic. She made a few comments about the bi-cameral service in the UK where real progress has been through collaboration between the digital service and the procedural experience. She said the people with procedural experience, working with technical developers, are learning the language of digital and thereby creating tools which are better fitted to the needs

of parliament. The people who manage the projects need to have the ability to understand both languages and processes.

She said the other issue is prioritisation because there is more demand for digital tools than resource. It is also difficult to recruit and retain staff in the digital area because, when it comes to pay, they have better options. Secretaries General have to prioritise doing several projects very well rather than lots of projects poorly. She said that broadcasting cannot be considered separate from the digital business. The House of Commons is undertaking structural changes to align these two parts of its business.

Mr Etman (Egypt) said in Egypt they have put in place a system of ‘e - communication’ and all paper documents were discontinued in 2021. Draft laws, for example, are sent in digital form to the MPs. All members have been given tablets to ensure they can use the new systems. All documents, such as the agenda, papers for committees and reports are now shared digitally.

At the same time Egypt is also creating a new administrative centre which will be a totally digital city. They are awaiting final approval but the new parliament building will be entirely digital and paperless. There will be a new technical support centre to prepare for this digital transformation and to train staff members on digital work. He said that at first there was resistance from staff and they had to engage with MPs, particularly older ones, to support them to accept digital methods. Now, everyone without exception is dealing with procedures digitally.

Andy Richardson responded that he was delighted to hear about the initiatives realised by the secretaries general. He recalled that the IPU, in 2022, ran focus groups with Secretaries General from different regions to discuss these subjects and have deeper exchanges. Hearing about the wealth of experience, he said he would like to organise a few more focus groups to delve into the detail and bring all of that learning into the guide.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, concluded by emphasising the value of the project which would enable a cascade of efforts to come together on this important issue and reflects the best aspirations of our Association.

3. Presentation: Questionnaire to share experiences on ‘Welcoming New Member of Parliament’

Ms Laurence Marzal, presented a new project, a partnership between the IPU and the ASGP to create a survey then guide on ‘welcoming new members of parliament’. She informed members that the aim of the project is to provide secretaries general with resources and tools which will help them prepare for the arrival of new members. The origin of the project was a request from the parliament of Tchad for support.

She reminded members that Mr Malo Adrien BEYOM (Tchad) had presented a communication on this theme at the session in Kigali, which was based on an IPU

project which drew on case studies from the francophone parliaments. The research materials gained from the project helped Tchad to prepare for new members in 2021. The study also revealed an appetite, on behalf of those parliaments who contributed, to learn about the experiences of other parliaments on this matter.

The aim of the project would be to produce a reference document, which would not be prescriptive, but would create an action plan on the welcome and reception of new parliamentarians. It would consider what information is conveyed to new parliamentarians. She informed Members that early studies with Tchad, Haiti and Djibouti had already taken place. The next steps would be to draft a questionnaire, calling on the help of a Working Group, when questions are finalised it would then be sent to all members of the Association for information. At the next Assembly in Angola, there will be a progress report on first responses to the questionnaire and to organise a thematic discussion or focus group to delve further into best practices and case studies which could be highlighted in the document. We hope the document will be published in 2024.

Barbara Dithapo (Botswana), confirming the questionnaire format, said that getting the information and then distributing it in a guide will be helpful for all. The reference guide will help future Secretaries General who are preparing to welcome new Members. She said she hoped the questionnaire would be very comprehensive so that they could produce something of real value as a result of the responses.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, commented that this is yet another project of collaboration between our two organisations.

4. Communication: Ms Steejit Taipiboonsuk, Deputy Secretary General of the House of Representatives of Thailand, ‘e-Initiative: The role of the House of Representatives in empowering voters to lodge a bill through the digital platform’

Ms Steejit Taipiboonsuk, Deputy Secretary General of the House of Representatives of Thailand, spoke as follows:

Introduction

According to the Thai Constitution, the Council of Ministers, Members of the House of Representatives, and eligible voters are empowered to lodge a bill to the National Assembly. This communication will elaborate a brief history of Thailand’s bill initiative process, the relevant laws, the challenges within the traditional initiative process, and the new role that the Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand has been given by the latest law in facilitating people to lodge a bill or a draft constitutional amendment as well as adopting digital tools within the process.

1. Development of Thailand’s Bill Initiative Process

More than 90 percent of the bills are submitted by the Council of Ministers; however, eligible voters have been granted the right to introduce a bill directly to the National Assembly for the first time by the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E.

2540 (1997), which stipulated that at least 50,000 voters can initiate a bill. Bills introduced this way must be related to the rights and liberties of the Thai people or the duties of the Thai people. The rules and procedures for initiating the bills by eligible voters were prescribed in the Initiative Process Act, B.E. 2542 (1999).

Later, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2550 (2007) reduced the minimum number of people required to submit a bill to 10,000 people, along with an amendment and promulgation of the Initiative Process Act, B.E. 2556 (2013). This 2013 Act was to make the people's initiative process more accessible and practical by specifying procedures for initiating, examining, and publishing the list of sponsors, as well as allowing the sponsors to withdraw their names if they were used without their consent.

Nowadays, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2560 (2017) requires at least 10,000 voters to be able to initiate a bill. It also includes a new section enabling at least 50,000 voters to submit a motion for amending the Constitution. Thailand reforms its legislative process to create mechanisms to help people in drafting and proposing draft bills. For this reason, the Initiative Process Act, B.E. 2564 (2021) has been promulgated to be in line with the current Constitution.

2. The New Initiative Process Act: Roles of the Secretariat

According to the 2021 Initiative Process Act, initiative process means the submission of a petition for introducing a bill or a draft constitution amendment which can only be done by eligible voters. In addition, the Act provides the four stages of the initiative process as below:

(1) Guidelines

The Act provides eligible voters guidelines for introducing the relevant documents, including the draft text of the bill, the principle of the bill, the rationale for introducing the bill, and the summary of the bill. The eligible voters can proceed with the documents by themselves. Alternatively, at least 20 eligible voters could request the Secretariat of the House of Representatives to prepare the documents for initiating a bill, or at least 120 voters for a draft constitutional amendment.

(2) Consideration of Principle

The relevant documents on the bill then shall be proposed to the Speaker of the House of Representatives (or the President of the National Assembly for a draft constitution amendment) for his or her consideration of principle. The bill must relate to the rights and liberties of the Thai people or the duties of the State according to the Constitution.

(3) Inviting signatories

If the eligible voters prepare the bill by themselves, 10,000 signatories for a bill or 50,000 signatories for a draft constitutional amendment, as well as all supporting documents, shall be collected before introducing the bill to the Secretariat of the

House of Representatives. It. There is no requirement that eligible voters should finish collecting signatures within a time limit. If the eligible voters request the Secretariat of the House of Representatives to work on this process, the Secretariat shall invite other voters to support the bill and collect the names of sponsors through an appropriate channel, including a digital platform. If within a year this process doesn't manage to meet the required number of signatories, the Secretariat shall refer this matter to the initiators, and the latter shall continue rallying the voters. If in another 90 days, the required number of signatories is still not met, the Secretariat shall cease the process.

(4) Submitting and introducing

After the process of collecting names, the Secretariat must conduct a public hearing for the purpose of the bill, including the assessment of the impact which may arise from the bill. Then, the bill shall be submitted to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, or to the President of the National Assembly for the draft constitutional amendment, as well as all relevant evidence. Finally, the bill shall proceed under the Rules of Procedure of the House. As we see in the latest Initiative Process Act, this is the first time in Thailand that the Secretariat of the House of Representatives has been granted duties more than the administration role in facilitating the eligible voters in the initiative process. The first duty is to provide legal services in preparing the documents and the bills. The second one is the role in the stage of inviting and collecting sponsors' names. The last one is to prepare public opinion and assess the impact of the bill.

3. Challenges within the Traditional Process

Under the provision of the previous laws on the initiative process, the eligible voters who initiate a bill are not only required to draft the bill themselves but also to publicize, invite and find sponsors by collecting a list of names with supporting documents for signing on the bill proposal themselves. The documents include a form with the sponsor's signature, a copy of the sponsor's House Registration, and a copy of the sponsor's ID card, all in physical form. At least 10,000 sets of these papers must be examined before proceeding any further.

After the examination of all supporting documents, the Secretariat of the House of Representatives must collect all sponsors' ID numbers from those supporting documents – 4 - and send them to the Department of Provincial Administration to verify the identity of each sponsor and confirm whether they are eligible voters. The letter of confirmation will be sent to all sponsors after the verification process. All of these steps are time-consuming and required a large amount of manpower to accomplish the process within a limited time as stipulated by the law. Moreover, it generates massive amounts of paper, leads to environmental degradation, and exacerbates climate change issues.

4. Collecting Signatories on a Digital Platform: the e-Initiative System

Since Thailand adopted the country's strategic and reform plans, focusing on the use of information technology in the government sector to facilitate public service, there is another law, the Digitalization of Public Administration and Services Delivery Act,

B.E. 2562 (2019), requiring all government agencies to use digital ID instead of physical documents.

In addition, the Secretariat of the House of Representatives has its strategy for transforming itself into a SMART Parliament, emphasizing digital development within the office. Therefore, in 2021, the Secretariat hosted a Hackathon, inviting undergraduates majoring in Computer Science to join the brainstorming session on designing and developing the digital platform for the initiative process.

In 2022, our Bureau of Information Technology gathered inputs from the Hackathon and developed an in-house web-based application called 'e-Initiative' as a new platform for facilitating the people's initiative process. This information technology system helps eligible voters in signing to support the bill initiated by people. The most important system of the application is a Digital ID control system, which is the digital identity verification of everyone. The e-Initiative application relies on the National Digital ID system called 'D.DOPA', developed by the Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of Internal Affairs, enabling all eligible voters to verify their identities with the Civil Registration database and sign their names through this e-Initiative platform with no physical documents required.

The e-Initiative system is developed under the NIST 800-63-3 Digital Identity Guideline standard, which has 4 main elements, as follows;

1. Entity: Applicant who needs to prove their identity before using the service
2. Id Provider (IdP): Data access service provider who is responsible for managing data in the process of proving and confirming digital identity to users and Relying Party, and can connect to confirmation systems such as National Digital ID services, D.DOPA application of the Department of Provincial Administration, etc.
3. Relying Party (RP): Service providers who need the information to confirm the identity of the user to approve the users to receive certain services. Relying Party will request information from Id Provider and Authorizing Source. Here, it means various government agencies that provide digital services for people to use, such as the Secretariat.
4. Authorizing Source (AS): An agency that can access or own digital identity information needed for confirmation of the reliability of collected personal data, including the Department of Provincial Administration.

Since the e-Initiative has been launched last year, there are 7 bills and a draft constitutional amendment initiated by eligible voters through this platform. One of them, namely the Bill on National Pension and Social Welfare for the Elderly, is the first bill that completed its collecting signatories process with 12,069 sponsors. Now, it is in the stage of submitting evidence to be examined.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked the member for their presentation and invited questions from the floor.

Mr Manuel Caverro (Spain) asked whether the systems creates a huge workload for the secretariat of the Assembly, queried what legal services are provided to the eligible voters and whether this included drafting. He said it is important to have a well drafted Bill to pass through the Parliament.

Ms Maija-Leena PAAVOLA (Finland) said that the system in Finland was quite similar. They amended the constitution in 2012, so that at least 50,000 Finish citizens, who are eligible to vote, can submit initiatives to parliament for legislation. The signatory window is open for 6-months via a digital platform. Citizens can propose new legislation, amendments or the repeal of existing legislation. The initiative must contain a proposed legal text and present justifications. After the names have been checked, confirmation of at least 50,000 eligible voters, the spokesperson can submit it formally to the parliament. In Finland, parliamentary staff do not check the names, an arm's length body does this. The parliament also does not have to accept a citizens initiative. It begins with a debate, then the matter is referred to a committee and the spokes people are given an opportunity to state their case to the committee. Since 2012, there have been 1431 initiatives, out of this 64 initiatives have reached 50,000 signatures and 7 initiatives have been accepted.

Mr Manna (Egypt) asked what is the general assessment of the system as a whole?

Ms Claressa (Australia) said this issue is not at all familiar in the Australia where there are no citizen-initiated proposals. She enquired about the increase in work that is required to support the system and the nature of the legal services which are provided to the citizens who initiate proposals.

Mr Miguel LANDEROS (Chile) commented that the national pension bill is a very technical issue, it would need to consider the age of the population and the resources of the population. He asked how the Secretaries General support redaction of a very complex Bill or is it merely the documentation?

Ms Steejit Taipiboonsuk (Thailand) responded to Spain by saying that the secretariat provide a drafting service for the Bill and supported documents and help with verification to ensure that it fits with the constitution. If it passes this process, it will then go through the original processes of the House. In response to Egypt, she said there are two bureaus of officials who respond, under the constitution they are required to have enough legal and other officials, so and there are enough to manage the demand.

5. **Communication: Mr George Xolile, Secretary to the Parliament, South Africa on “The Role of Parliaments in fighting Intolerance, Promoting Peaceful Co-existence and Inclusive Societies’**

Mr Xolile George, Secretary to the Parliament, South Africa, spoke as follows:

1. Introduction

1.1 Continuity in Change: the quest for promotion of peaceful co-existence and inclusive societies and maintenance of international peace and stability is not a novelty. Realising these noble ideas has been a preoccupation of Heads of States and Government, national parliaments, international organizations, multi-lateral and supranational bodies for many years.

1.2 In fact, creating an inclusive, rules-based, peaceful and stable international order marked by peaceful-coexistence predates the current international system as represented by the United Nations (UN) and its various agencies- the Bretton Woods institutions and other global governance institutions.

1.3 Shifting Contours of International Relations and Diplomacy- to begin to notice this long history of international efforts aimed at creating peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies- one needs to look no further than the long duration of international relations and diplomacy during and post the two world wars (WW I & WW II).

1.4 Unity of Purpose- The predecessors of the current international organizations such as the UN and regional bodies like the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) were also preoccupied with similar issues and questions- while placing a premium on multilateralism as an organizing principle and a launching pad for creating unity of purpose. International organizations such as the League of Nations (a precursor of the UN) and the Organization of African Unity-OAU (a precursor of the AU) also viewed peaceful-coexistence and inclusive societies as an essential precondition for a peaceful and stable world. For instance, Article 11 of the Covenant of the League of Nations states that 'any war or threat of war, whether immediately affecting any of the Members of the League or not, is hereby declared a matter of concern to the whole League, and the League shall take any action that may be deemed wise and effectual to safeguard the peace of nations'.¹ Taking a cue from the League of Nations Covenant, the 1945 UN Charter also viewed peaceful co-existence as critical to maintenance of international peace and security. Thus Chapters VI and VII of the UN Charter specifically outline measures to be taken to maintain or restore international peace and security.

1.5 Paradigm Shift: From State Security to Human Security- while the end of bipolarity that characterised the Cold War period did not bring about expected peace dividend- as shown by conflicts and complex humanitarian emergencies in places like the former Yugoslavia, Cambodia and East Timor and by the Rwandan genocide- it resulted to a paradigm shift in the international discourse on and practice of security. This shift involved the broadening of the unit of analysis of security from the state to individuals and groups of people within states³. The post-Cold War period also coincided with the move away from 'state-centric' of security to a more broadened and people-centred understanding of security encapsulated in the concept of 'human security'. Fighting intolerance, promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies are all at the heart of human security.

During the periods preceding the Cold War, security was only seen from the optics of sovereignty and statehood- taken as a sine qua non of 'state-ness' or as a *raison d'être* of a state⁴. Writing in the 19th century, Max Weber viewed the state as that "entity

with the monopoly over the legitimate use of force” - indirectly saying that security is a defining feature of the state and its provision is at the heart of the state.⁵ This understanding of security permeated throughout the UN system and for longest of times- informed how international relations were conducted. But with the end of Cold War, this changed completely

1.6 Agenda for Peace- Freedom from Fear and Freedom from Want- within the UN, the concept of human security was first formulated in the 1992 Agenda for Peace, proposed by former Secretary General, Boutros Boutros Ghali, which stressed the indispensable role of the UN in an integrated approach to human security, as one of the new requisites in peacemaking, peacekeeping and postconflict management⁶.

The 1994 Human Development Report further expanded on the idea of human security⁷. In fact, the UNDP 1994 Human Development Report⁸ set the tone for all succeeding definitions by articulating a universal, preventive, “peoplecentred” approach that focused jointly on “freedom from fear and freedom from want.”

In the Report of the Secretary-General titled- ‘In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all’¹⁰ once again, peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies were seen as an integral part of human security

1.7 New Agenda for Change: Human Development- immediately after the postCold war period- the focus was on new agenda for change – thus the concepts of human security and human development came to dominate debates on security and development¹¹.

1.8 As they gained strong acceptance in international security, development and legal discourse, they also became instrumental in bringing into the international community’s attention the threats that the emerging global issues such as intolerance, absence of peaceful co-existence and inclusive societies, intrastate wars, terrorism, climate change, diseases, food insecurity, human trafficking, displacement and others pose not only to the international peace and security but also to the wellbeing of individuals and communities¹².

1.9 Creating an Inclusive Society- In 1995, world leaders made commitments for global social change in the World Summit for Social Development [that resulted to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development]. Amongst others; they committed to ‘create an inclusive society’, “a society for all”, as one of the key goals of social development. The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, a key outcome of the Summit, pledged to make the eradication of poverty, full employment and social integration overriding objectives of development. Member states made a commitment to promote social integration through fostering inclusive societies that are stable, safe, just and tolerant, and respect diversity, equality of opportunity and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.

2. Conceptual Overview: What is Tolerance, Peaceful Coexistence and Inclusive Society?

2.1 The three are interrelated and/or mutually reinforcing- you cannot talk about one without mentioning another.

2.2 Tolerance- according to the United Nations Millennium Declaration tolerance means that human beings must respect one other, in all their diversity of belief, culture and language. A critical aspect of tolerance is that differences within and between societies should be neither feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity. A culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations should be actively promoted. Viewed from the optics of politics, tolerance is ‘the willingness to extend basic rights and civil liberties to persons and groups whose viewpoints differ from one's own. It is a central tenet of a liberal democracy’.

2.3 Peaceful Co-existence- this concept is self-explanatory and simply refers to living together in peace rather than in constant hostility. From the international relations perspective, peaceful coexistence ‘signifies in essence the repudiation of war as a means of solving controversial issues.... it presupposes an obligation to refrain from every form of violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of another state’.

2.4 Inclusive Society: according to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), ‘an inclusive society is a society that over-rides differences of race, gender, class, generation, and geography, and ensures inclusion, equality of opportunity as well as capability of all members of the society to determine an agreed set of social institutions that govern social interaction’. The World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen 1995) defines an inclusive society as a “society for all in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play”. Such an inclusive society must be based on respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, cultural and religious diversity, social justice and the special needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, democratic participation and the rule of law.²⁰ It is promoted by social policies that seek to reduce inequality and create flexible and tolerant societies that embrace all people. The World Summit for Social Development, established the concept of social integration to create an inclusive society, “a society for all”, as one of the key goals of social development.

2.5 Given its cross-cutting nature- the concept of inclusive society is closely related to other equally important concepts that have assumed a prominent place in the global public policy agenda, namely: social integration, social cohesion and social inclusion.

2.6 Social Integration- according to the United Nations Millennium Declaration, social integration is understood as a dynamic and principled process of promoting the values, relations and institutions that enable all people to participate in social, economic, cultural and political life on the basis of equality of rights, equity and dignity. It is the process in which societies engage in order to foster societies that are stable, safe and just – societies that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as respect for and value of dignity of each individual, diversity, pluralism, tolerance, non-discrimination, non-violence, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security, and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.

2.7 Social cohesion: for the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, social cohesion refers to the elements that bring and hold people together in society.²⁴ In a socially cohesive society all individuals and groups have a sense of belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy. Social cohesive societies are not necessarily demographically homogenous. Rather, by respecting diversity, they harness the potential residing in their societal diversity (in terms of ideas, opinions, skills, etc.). Therefore, they are less prone to slip into destructive patterns of tension and conflict when different interests collide.

2.8 Social inclusion: for the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, social inclusion is understood as a process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of their background, so that they can achieve their full potential in life.²⁷ It is a multi-dimensional process aimed at creating conditions which enable full and active participation of every member of the society in all aspects of life, including civic, social, economic, and political activities, as well as participation in decision-making processes.

2.9 At its core, social inclusion focuses on creating conditions for equal opportunities and equal access for all, is considered to be useful when describing the actual process involved in promoting social integration. Social inclusion is also often more easily accepted as a policy goal, as it clearly eliminates a connotation of assimilation that some associate with the term “integration” - not all individuals and/or groups in societies are eager to be “integrated” into mainstream society, but all strive to be included.

2.10 At the core of most definitions of social inclusion lies the concept of full participation in all aspects of life, while exclusion refers to the conditions (barriers and processes) that impede inclusion. Participation is most significant as it denotes an active involvement in the process, not merely having access to society’s activities, but engaging in them, and building and maintaining a social network. Participation also creates a sense of responsibility towards others, a community or an institution, and influences decisions or enables individuals to have access to the decision-making processes.

3. Five Steps of Social Inclusion

3.1 In order to understand the actual process of social inclusion, Goran Therborn (2007, 2) suggests that the following five categories of inclusion could be considered as incremental steps to promote social inclusion:

a. Visibility: First and foremost, people need to be noticed, recognized, and have their own voices. There is no possibility of having a voice if an individual or group is not accounted for and represented in the processes that make up formal society. One of the greatest difficulties even at a local level is the actual census of population. People remain uncounted and therefore invisible.

b. Consideration: The concerns and needs of individuals and groups are taken into account by policy-makers. Often policy-makers do not consider the poor and other marginalized groups as important stakeholders, and therefore, do not incorporate their needs and concerns.

c. Access to Social Interactions: People must be able to engage in society's activities and social networks in their daily life, including economic, social, cultural, religious, and political activities.

d. Rights: People must have rights to act and claim, rights to be different, legal rights, rights to access social services, such as housing, education, transportation, and health care. They must have the right to work and the right to participate in social, cultural and political life. The right to claim will regress if one is discriminated.

e. Resources to fully participate in society: Those who do not have access to rights are not able to participate fully in society. However, even if people have rights to access, they cannot participate fully without adequate resources. Therefore, resources to fully participate in all aspects of societal activities are the ultimate step for successful social inclusion.

4. Dimensions and elements of Social Inclusion and Exclusion

4.1 Social inclusion touches almost all dimensions of life, both individual and societal. These dimensions can be categorized in many different ways.

5. Key Groups to be Included: Who is Marginalized?

5.1 There is a substantial variation from country to country regarding which groups are subject to exclusion³². a. Women b. People living in poverty c. Persons with disabilities d. Children, youth and older

5.2 In many countries, social cohesion is threatened by social tensions or institutional biases that exclude: People with different ethnic, religious or cultural backgrounds. Recent migrants are also often excluded by local communities or society at large.

6. Removing the Obstacles to Social Inclusion

6.1 One mechanism of removing obstacles to social inclusion include eliminating and/or amending Discriminatory Laws and Practices. This is often as the fundamental first step to lay the foundations for an inclusive society.

6.2 There are core legally binding international human rights treaties within the UN human rights system, which can be effectively applied to promote inclusion of vulnerable groups. These are:

- Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),
- Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR),
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD),
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),

- Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT),
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD), and Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICPMW)

6.3 In addition, there are many other universal instruments relating to human rights, including;

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (1989)
- Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities,
- Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and;
- United Nations Principles for Older Persons

7. International Policy Frameworks for Achieving Social Inclusion

7.1 It is widely acknowledged that achieving social inclusion requires long-term strategic response on the part of all institutions and organizations, also at an international level.

7.2 There are mechanisms in place through a variety of international bodies and groups to support empowerment and capacity building of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, and indigenous peoples.

7.3 In this area, comprehensive frameworks have already been developed with their implementation action plans or programmes adopted at the United Nations summits and conferences. Among others, the following are important:

- The Beijing Platform for Action;
- The World Programme of Action for Youth;
- The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing;
- World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons.

8. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

8.1 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.

8.2 At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership.

8.3 The SDGs build on decades of work (shown below) by countries and the UN, including the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs:

I. In June 1992, at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, more than 178 countries adopted Agenda 21, a comprehensive plan of action to build a global partnership for sustainable development to improve human lives and protect the environment.

II. Member States unanimously adopted the Millennium Declaration at the Millennium Summit in September 2000 at UN Headquarters in New York. The Summit led to the elaboration of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reduce extreme poverty by 2015.

III. The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Plan of Implementation, adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa in 2002, reaffirmed the global community's commitments to poverty eradication and the environment, and built on Agenda 21 and the Millennium Declaration by including more emphasis on multilateral partnerships.

IV. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012, Member States adopted the outcome document "The Future We Want" in which they decided, inter alia, to launch a process to develop a set of SDGs to build upon the MDGs and to establish the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. The Rio +20 outcome also contained other measures for implementing sustainable development, including mandates for future programmes of work in development financing, small island developing states and more.

V. In 2013, the General Assembly set up a 30-member Open Working Group to develop a proposal on the SDGs.

VI. In January 2015, the General Assembly began the negotiation process on the post-2015 development agenda. The process culminated in the subsequent adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 17 SDGs at its core, at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015.

VII. 2015 was a landmark year for multilateralism and international policy shaping, with the adoption of several major agreements: Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (March 2015) Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development (July 2015) Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 SDGs was adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York in September 2015. Paris Agreement on Climate Change (December 2015)

8.4 The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what these did not achieve. They seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.

8.5 The following are the SDGs that are relevant to fighting intolerance, promoting peaceful co-existence and inclusive societies:

I. Goal 10: Reduced Inequality within and Among Countries

II. Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities- Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

III. Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions- Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

9. Fighting Intolerance, Promoting Peaceful Co-existence and Inclusive societies:
Current Realities and Future Prospects

9.1 A Rules-based and Stable Global Political and Economic Order based on effective multilateralism: The UN and its agencies and international organizations like IPU have to be commended for continued efforts aimed at maintaining international peace and security and for bringing stability and order to the international system of international relations.

9.2 Shouldering Global Responsibility for attainment of Global Commons: Many efforts at global, continental, regional and national levels have been made to avoid other world wars and instability that characterised most of the Cold war era. Such collective efforts included, as indicated above: – Developing legally binding treaties and conventions; – Establishing global governance institutions and international criminal justice institutions such as the International Criminal Court – Developing global partnerships and making international commitments to advance agenda for change to protect the future of humanity as evinced by Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals

9.3 The world is becoming unsafe: notwithstanding concerted efforts to bring order and stability in the international system and ensure that the international community still enjoys the post-cold war peace dividend- the sad reality is that we seem to be reversing the gains made thus far (particularly on security and development) and we are regressing on many fronts- as the world is increasingly becoming unsafe.

9.4 As we speak, there are still countries embroiled in internecine and intermitted armed conflicts- thus effectively turning other regions of the world into neighbourhoods of instability

9.5 Regions of Instability: According to the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, ‘there are more than 45 armed conflicts in Middle East and North Africa’.³⁸ And ‘this is, in numbers, the most affected region: more than 45 armed conflicts are currently taking place throughout the Middle East and North Africa in the following territories: Cyprus, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Yemen and Western Sahara’.

9.6 Africa comes second in the number of armed conflicts per region with more than 35 non-international armed conflicts (NIACs) taking place in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan and

Sudan. Several armed groups – fighting against government forces and/or against each other's – are involved in these conflicts.

9.7 According to the Geneva Academy, Asia is the theatre of 19 noninternational armed conflicts (NIACs) involving 19 armed groups. These are happening in Afghanistan, India, Myanmar, Pakistan and The Philippines.

9.8 On the other hand, Europe is also the theatre of an international armed conflict (IAC) between Ukraine and Russia, and of two non-international armed conflicts (NIACs) in Ukraine opposing governmental forces with the selfproclaimed 'People's Republics' of Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine.

9.9 What makes matters worse is the rise in political intolerance, narrow nationalism, political and religious fundamentalism- which all frustrate efforts aimed at promoting peaceful-co-existence and inclusive societies

9.10 While many governments have brilliant policies and have adopted futuristic policy making as shown by the National Development Plans with long term horizon- there is still a disjuncture between policy making and policy implementation- which result to failure of redress programmes and systematic inequalities

9.11 While many governments make international commitments, sign treaties and conventions- domestication and harmonisation of international treaties with national laws and policies happens at a snail's pace. Progress on implementation of national government programmes and on following up on international commitments happens, if at all, in a parsimonious fashion.

9.12 To make matters worse, 'the world is not on track to meet its goal of ending extreme poverty by 2030'. In fact, global progress to reduce extreme poverty "has grinded to a halt" over the past few years and we're in the middle of the largest increase in global inequality since World War II.

9.13 An increasingly unequal world- equally concerning is the global growth in inequalities –particularly in the developing world in general-global South in particular. For instance, South Africa had the highest inequality in income distribution in 2021 with a Gini score of 63 and its neighbours Namibia and Zambia followed in second and third, respectively.

9.14 Moreover, according to the Global Hunger Index 2022, which was adopted by the International Food Policy Research Institute, Yemen was the most affected by hunger and malnutrition, with an index of 45.1. The Central African Republic followed with an index of 44.45

9.15 Post-Covid19 period, New Normal- Gloomy Global Economic Outlook- the following is the depressing state of global political economy:

- People with the lowest incomes faced the steepest costs during the pandemic.
- Income losses averaged 4% for the poorest 40% of people. That's double the losses faced by the wealthiest 20% of people. This caused global inequality to rise for the

first time in decades. And COVID-19 pushed 70 million people into extreme poverty in 2020

— the largest single-year increase since 1990. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 60% of all people living in extreme poverty, or 389 million people. The region has the world's highest poverty rate: about 35%.

— Almost 2 billion workers now live in countries where inflation is outpacing wages. A shocking 1.7 billion people don't have high enough wages to keep up with inflation — and it's having major consequences on people's lives.

— Over 820 million people (or about 1 in 10 people) don't have sufficient food. Women and girls make up nearly 60% of the world's hungry population.

— The richest 1% of people captured 63% of all new wealth since 2020. Only 37% of new wealth went to the entire rest of the world population, according to Oxfam.

That's \$26 trillion to the richest 1% ... and only \$16 trillion to everyone else over the past three years.

10. What is to be Done? The normative role of Parliaments

10.1 With this depressing state of global affairs- the two main questions that arise are: what is to be done? And where are Parliaments? In particular, what is the Role of Parliaments in Fighting Intolerance, Promoting Peaceful Coexistence and Inclusive societies?

10.2 Parliaments have an indispensable role to play in changing this depressing state of affairs and in refocusing and redirecting the international community to a right trajectory.

10.3 Through their law-making, oversight and accountability and facilitation of public participation- parliaments can play a more meaningful role in Fighting Intolerance, Promoting Peaceful Co-existence and Inclusive societies.

10.4 As the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs acknowledged back in 2009, the essential role of international organizations, national and local governments, parliaments and civil society groupings in promoting peaceful co-existence and inclusive societies cannot be overlooked.

10.5 Law Making: engage in transformative law making by repealing old laws that are not consistent with the values and/or ethos of constitutional democracy and those that are stifling or frustrating progress on cross-cutting socioeconomic policy issues such as promoting peaceful co-existence and inclusive societies through, amongst others; social cohesion programmes.

10.6 Public Participation- through facilitating public engagement of multiple stakeholders, especially civil society in legislative processes, parliaments can ensure active participation of all members of society in finding solutions to the problems at hand (intolerance and social exclusion) regardless of their backgrounds.

10.7 Transformative Budgeting and Legislative Processes: parliaments to use their constitutional powers to ensure that they pass government budgets that talk to adequate allocation of resources to social cohesion and social inclusion programmes.

10.8 Focused and Intentional Oversight and Accountability: in exercising their oversight and accountability duties, parliaments need to pay closer attention to government's implementation of policies and programmes with potential to have amplified impact on attainment of international, continental, regional and national development goals. Through effective monitoring and evaluation systems and processes, Parliaments need to monitor whether governments are utilizing more efficiently the resources allocated for various implementation of various government programmes- more especially social development programmes.

10.9 Robust Resolution Tracking Mechanism and International Instruments: parliaments need to also have functional resolution tracking mechanisms to ensure that commitments made and decisions taken in international forums such as the World Summit for Social Development are being implemented in order to achieve the goals of the Summit through national action and regional and international cooperation.

10.10 During the World Summit for Social Development, amongst others, countries committed in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development (1995) to “an improved and strengthened framework for international, regional and sub-regional cooperation for social development, in a spirit of partnership, through the United Nations and other multilateral institutions”. Parliaments need to follow up on commitments like these.

10.11 Harness Parliamentary Diplomacy for attainment of developmental outcomes: parliamentarians need to learn from and collaborate with other parliamentarians on a number of issues including on developing non-binding model laws and in developing global common positions on developmental issues. In addition, they also need to complement, strengthen and positively influence traditional government diplomacy advantageously.

11. Conclusion

11.1 Undoubtedly, parliaments have an indispensable role to play in fighting intolerance, promoting peaceful co-existence and Inclusive societies. Whilst there are many challenges faced by the international community today there is still hope for a just, equal, peaceful, stable and prosperous world and parliaments have an equally important task of ensuring that the future generations get to live in such a world. And the only way they can do that is to use their constitutional mandates (law-making, oversight and accountability and public participation) to fight intolerance in all its guise, promote peaceful coexistence and Inclusive societies.

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked the member for their presentation, the last of the conference, and invited questions from the floor.

M. Naim ÇOBAN (Turkey) commented that he would like to express his support for being proactive about this agenda. As was mentioned yesterday, secretaries general do not have to re-invent the wheel, our parliaments may have different structures but common solutions can be shared. He said members should think about the challenges they face and not lag behind. Secretaries General need to be proactive about acting to strengthen their internal structures.

Ms Claressa (Australia) wished the new member welcome and commented that both Australia and South Africa were colonised and, although they are very different contexts, she considered South Africa as a useful example in the context of indigenous Australians being recognised. She recalled the truth commissions of South Africa, following Nelson Mandela's rule, and the nature of some of those experiences. She asked whether this was an important element of acknowledgement, helping people to reach across barriers in society, or do we need new approaches to tackle the problems across society?

Mr George Xolile (South Africa) responded to Australia that acknowledgement of the past becomes a product of conversations in a country embracing its past and that it was not an easy process in South Africa. It was a negotiated settlement towards a peaceful coexistence and the best constitution in the world. However, the reality is otherwise and any social compact that is derived from acknowledgement must also involve committing to a future. He said there are deep structural inequalities which are systemic with regards class, race, belief.

Many reviews have been done of the Constitution, for example Section 25, which deals with the land question, less than 25% of land is in the hands of indigenous people. He said the state must acquire land and fairly distribute it, which is the most difficult question. It will require investment in dialogue, a commitment across the board, done in the best interest of the country. He said that even after 29 years of democracy, South Africa is still grappling with its democracy but they want to forge a path together.

6. Draft agenda for the next meeting in Nusa Dua (Indonesia), March 2022

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, raised two budgetary matters. Firstly, he announced there would be a new website for the Association, for which the Executive Committee has granted exceptional funding, 15,000 – 20,000 CHF. It will maintain all the current functions of the website whilst seeking improvements such as easier search functions, better display on phones and tablets.

He further informed members that Executive Committee has agreed to commission some small gifts which the ASGP can offer to hosts at each session. He also proposed that a little history of the Association be created to increase awareness of its aims and work.

The Association approved the three projects.

7. Draft Orders of the Day for the Angola Conference

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, said that the next meeting of the Association would take place in Luanda, Angola, between 23 and 27 of October 2023.

He recalled that members should separate the administrative focus of the ASGP from the political nature of the IPU in their contributions. He reminded members that the Association's focus is on the practical concerns of running parliamentary administrations. He then presented the titles of the proposed themes and general debates for the next conference:

- Theme: The skills of parliamentary administrations in terms of the regulation and use of artificial intelligence
 - Theme: Cooperation between parliamentary administrations
 - Theme: Promoting transparency and accountability through better institutional communication in Parliaments
 - How have Parliaments changed as a result of the pandemic?
1. GENERAL DEBATE: The renewal of representative democracies in a time of crisis: challenges and opportunities?
 2. GENERAL DEBATE with informal discussion groups: The relationship between the administration and parliamentarians

The Assembly approved the draft agenda.

8. Concluding Remarks

Mr Najib El Khadi, President, thanked all secretaries general for the quality of their work and contributions and thanked the hosts Bahrain for organising an excellent programme.

He thanked the interpreters, who make communication between all the countries of the world possible.

Finally, he thanked the secretariat of the Association: Ms Capucine Capon, Ms Elektra Garvie-Adams, Mr Daniel Moeller and Ms Karine Velasco.

The meeting concluded at 11h 40.