



UNION INTERPARLEMENTAIRE

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Constitutional & Parliamentary Information

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

The parliamentary system in Uzbekistan
(*Mr Qudrat Nuruallev, Uzbekistan*)

Harnessing Artificial Intelligence in the Bahraini Parliament: Towards a transformative shift in innovation
(*Mr Mohamed Ebrahim Alsisi Alboainain, Bahrain*)

Smart Agenda for plenary sessions and virtual tabling
(*Mr Dan Marzouk, Israel*)

Parliament and citizen participation (e.g. Citizens' Assembly, petitions)
(*General Debate*)

Meeting the expectations of young parliamentarians
(*Mr Mahmoud Ismail Etman, Egypt*)

Meeting the expectations of young parliamentarians
(*Ms Steejit Taipiboonsuk, Thailand*)

Meeting the expectations of young parliamentarians
(*Mr Safwan Basheer Al Gergeri, Iraq*)

Meeting the expectations of young parliamentarians
(*Mr Kennedy M. Chokuda, Zimbabwe*)

Meeting the expectations of young parliamentarians
(*Mr Alberto Nkutumula, Mozambique*)

Grand National Assembly of Türkiye in focus: Current developments, news and innovations
(*Mr Talip Uzun, Türkiye*)

Accessibility of Parliament for disabled people
(*Dr Silke Albin, German*)

Accessibility of Parliament for disabled people
(*Ms Kushani Rohanadeera, Sri Lanka*)

Accessibility of Parliament for disabled people
(*Ms Chloe Mawson, United Kingdom*)

Accessibility of Parliament for disabled people
(*Mr Jean-Philippe Brochu, Canada*)

Ensuring meaningful public participation in the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa
(*Mr Xolile George, South Africa*)

Parliamentary management of social media
(*General Debate*)

The rule of law dialogue in the Netherlands
(*Dr Remco Nehmelman, Netherlands*)

The use of precedents to preserve parliamentary memory
(*Mr Eric Tavernier, France*)

The use of precedents to preserve parliamentary memory
(*Mr Antti Peltari, Finland*)

The use of precedents to preserve parliamentary memory
(*Mr Pedro Agostinho de Neri, Angola*)

Review of the ASGP / 74th year / N° 226 / Tashkent, 6 – 9 April 2025

MINUTES OF THE SPRING SESSION

TASHKENT (UZBEKISTAN)

6-9 April 2025

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)

ASSOCIATION OF SECRETARIES GENERAL OF PARLIAMENTS

Minutes of the Spring Session 2025

Tashkent
6 to 9 April

List of attendance

MEMBERS AND SUBSTITUTES PRESENT

COUNTRY	CHAMBER or PARLIAMENT	NAME and TITLE
Albania	Parliament	Mr Genci GJONCAJ (SG)
Algeria	National People's Assembly	Mr Salim DJALAL (SG)
Angola	National Assembly	Mr Pedro Agostinho DE NERI (SG)
Armenia	National Assembly	Mr Davit ARAKELYAN (SG)
Australia	House of Representatives	Ms Claressa SURTEES (SG)
Austria	Parliament	Mr Alexis WINTONIAK (DSG)
Azerbaijan	Milli Majlis	Mr Farid HAJIYEV (SG)
Bahamas	Parliament	Mr Rashad FLOWERS (DSG)
Bahrain	Shura Council	Mrs Kareema ALABBASI (SG)
Bahrain	Council of Representatives	Mr Mohammed ALBUAINAIN (SG)
Belgium	Senate	Mr André REZSOHAZY (DG)
Bhutan	National Council	Mr Tenzin THINLEY (SG)
Botswana	National Assembly	Dr Gabriel Gosiamo G. MALEBANG (SG)
Bulgaria	National Assembly	Mrs Stefana KARASLAVOVA (SG)

Burkina Faso	Transitional Legislative Assembly	Mrs Valérie SIMPORÉ SOUBEIGA (SG)
Burundi	Senate	Mr Renovat NIYONZIMA (SG)
Cambodia	Senate	Mr NGOUN Sokveng for Mr LAY Samkol (SG)
Canada	House of Commons	Mr Jean-Philippe BROCHU for Mr Eric JANSE (SG)
Chile	Chamber of Deputies	Mr Luis ROJAS GALLARDO (DSG)
Congo (Dem. Rep.)	Senate	Mr Jean MUKUALA BATEKE (SG)
Congo (Dem. Rep.)	National Assembly	Mr Jean NGUVULU KHOJI (SG)
Egypt	House of Representatives	Mr Ahmed MANNA (SG)
Egypt	Senate	Mr Mahmoud ETMAN (SG)
Equatorial Guinea	Chamber of Deputies	Mr Bienvenido EKUA ESONO ABE (SG)
Equatorial Guinea	Senate	Mr Jesus OBAMA NZANG (SG)
Estonia	Parliament	Mr Antero HABICHT (SG)
Fiji	Parliament	Mrs Jeanette EMBERSON (SG)
Finland	Parliament	Mr Antti PELTTARI (SG)
France	Senate	Mr Eric TAVERNIER (SG, Presidency)
Georgia	Parliament	Mr Kakha OKROJANASHVILI (SG)
Germany	Bundestag	Dr Silke ALBIN (DSG)
Germany	Bundesrat	Dr Georg KLEEMANN (DSG)
Ghana	Parliament	Mr Ebenezer A. DJETROR (SG)
Guyana	National Assembly	Mr Sherlock E. ISAACS (SG)
Iceland	Parliament	Mrs Audur Elva JONSDÓTTIR (DSG)

India	Council of States (Rajya Sabha)	Mr Pramod Chandra MODY (SG)
Iraq	Council of Representatives	Mr Safwan Basheer Younus AL GERGERI (SG)
Ireland	Senate	Mrs Bridget DOODY (DSG)
Ireland	House of Representatives	Ms Elaine GUNN (DSG)
Israel	Knesset	Mr Dan MARZOUK (SG)
Italy	Chamber of Deputies	Mrs Maria Teresa CALABRO for Dr Fabrizio CASTALDI (SG)
Japan	House of Representatives	Mr Jun ISHIHARA for Mr Hideki KOBAYASHI (SG)
Jordan	House of Representatives	Mr Awwad AL GHUWAIRI (SG)
Kenya	Senate	Mr Jeremiah M. NYEGENYE (SG)
Kenya	Senate	Ms Eunice GICHANGI (DSG)
Latvia	Parliament	Ms Lelde RAFELDE (SG)
Lesotho	National Assembly	Mr Lebohang Fine MAEMA (SG)
Libya	House of Representatives	Mr Abdulla ALMASRI (SG)
Malawi	National Assembly	Mrs Fiona KALEMBA (SG)
Maldives	People's Majlis	Ms Fathimath NIUSHA (SG)
Mongolia	State Great Khural	Mr Baasandorj BARSUREN (SG)
Morocco	Chamber of Representatives	Mr Najib EL KHADI (SG)
Mozambique	Assembly of the Republic	Mr Alberto NKUTUMULA (SG)
Namibia	National Council	Mr Tousy NAMISEB (SG)
Nepal	National Assembly	Mr Padma Prasad PANDEY
Netherlands	Senate of the States General	Dr Remco NEHMELMAN (SG)

Netherlands	House of Representatives	Mr Peter OSKAM (SG)
Nigeria	National Assembly	Mr Kamoru OGUNLANA (SG)
Norway	Parliament	Mr Kyrre GRIMSTAD (SG)
Oman	Shura Council	Mr Ahmed Mohammed AL NADABI (SG)
Pakistan	Senate	Mr Syed Hasnain HAIDER (SG)
Poland	Senate	Ms Agata SOKOWOSKA-KARWOWSKA for Mrs Ewa POLKOWSKA (SG)
Poland	Sejm	Mr Jacek CICHOCKI (SG))
Qatar	Shura Council	Mr Nayef AL-MAHMOUD (SG)
Romania	Senate	Ms Arany VIKÁRIUS for Mr Mario Ovidiu OPREA (SG)
Rwanda	Senate	Dr Yvonne UMULISA (SG)
Sao Tomé et Príncipe	National Assembly	Mr Domingos José DA TRINDADE BOA MORTE (SG)
Saudi Arabia	Shura Council	Mr Mohamed ALMUTAIRI (SG)
Senegal	National Assembly	Mr Amadou THIMBO (SG)
Somalia	House of the People	Mr Mohamed Abdullahi ABDI (DSG)
South Africa	Parliament	Mr Xolile GEORGE (SG)
South Africa	National Assembly	Mr Masibulele XASO (SG)
South Sudan	Transitional National Legislative Assembly	Mr Makuc Makuc NGONG AKOT (SG)
Sri Lanka	Parliament	Mrs Kushani ROHANADEERA (SG)
Sri Lanka	Parliament	Mr Chaminda Kumara KULARATNE (DSG)
Suriname	National Assembly	Mr Dino OEDIT for Mrs Ruth Lucia DE WINDT (SG)

Sweden	Parliament	Mr Ingvar MATTSON (SG)
Tanzania	National Assembly	Mr Athuman HUSSEIN for Mr Baraka Ildephonce LEONARD (SG)
Thailand	Senate	Ms Nisaporn WIBOONCHAN for Mrs Pannita SATARNTRAIPOPE (SG)
Thailand	House of Representatives	Mr Nattakrit VONGJAREAN for Mr Arpath SUKHANUNTH (SG)
Thailand	House of Representatives	Ms Steejit TAIPIBOONSUK (DSG)
Timor Leste	National Parliament	Mr Edgar Sequeira MARTINS (SG)
Türkiye	Grand National Assembly	Mr Talip UZUN (SG)
United Arab Emirates	Federal National Council	Dr Omar AL NUAIMI (SG)
United Arab Emirates	Federal National Council	Mrs Afra ALBASTI (DSG)
United Kingdom	House of Lords	Mr Simon BURTON (SG)
United Kingdom	House of Lords	Ms Chloe MAWSON (DSG)
United Kingdom	House of Commons	Ms Sarah DAVIES (DSG)
Uruguay	Senate	Dr José Pedro MONTERO (DSG)
Uzbekistan	Senate	Mr Kudrat NURULLAEV (SG)
Vietnam	National Assembly	Mr LE Quang Tung (SG)
Zambia	Parliament	Mr Roy NGULUBE (SG)
Zimbabwe	National Assembly	Mr Kennedy Mugove CHOKUDA (SG)
Zimbabwe	National Assembly	Mrs Nomasonto Audrey SUNGA (DSG)

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Arab ASGP	Mr Jasem ALNUSIF (SG)
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ECOWAS Parliament	Mr Bertin SOMÉ (Acting SG)
Maghreb Consultative Council	Mr Said MOKADEM (SG)
Parliamentary Assembly of francophone countries	Mr Damien CESSÉLIN (SG)
Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC)	Mrs Boemo SEKGOMA (SG)

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FIRST SITTING

Sunday 6 April 2025 (morning)

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President in the Chair

THE SITTING WAS OPENED AT 11.05AM

1. Opening of the session

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, opened the session and warmly welcomed members of the Association and especially new members. He thanked his predecessor, Mr Najib El Khadi, for all his work. He then introduced the new French Co-Secretary, Ms Alice Lala, who has replaced Capucine Capon.

2. Members

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, 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:

For membership:

Dr Gabriel Gosiamé G. MALEBANG	Clerk of the National Assembly, Botswana
Mr Kalipha MM MBYE	Clerk of the National Assembly, The Gambia
Mr Md Mizanur RAHMAN	Secretary General of the Parliament, Bangladesh
Mr John STEVENS	Deputy Secretary General of the House of Representatives, Belgium
Mr Mikael KOILLINEN	Deputy Secretary General of the Parliament, Finland
Mr Kakha OKROJANASHVILI	Secretary General of the Parliament, Georgia
Mr Ebenezer A. DJIETROR	Clerk of the Parliament, Ghana
Mr Aboubacar CAMARA	Secretary General of the National Assembly, Guinea
Mr Alberto NKUTUMULA	Secretary General of the Assembly of the Republic, Mozambique
Mr Kamoru OGUNLANA	Clerk of the National Assembly, Nigeria
Dr Yvonne UMULISA	Clerk of the Senate, Rwanda

Mrs Pannita SATARNTRAIPOPE

Secretary General of the Senate, Thailand

Mr Kudrat NURULLAEV

Chief of Staff of the Senate, Uzbekistan

Mr LE Quang Tung

Secretary General of the National Assembly, Vietnam

The list was approved by the Association.

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, informed the Association that the Executive Committee proposed Ms Capucine Capon, former French Secretary, as honorary secretary of the Association.

The Association agreed to appoint Capucine Capon as honorary secretary to the Association.

3. Executive Committee elections

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, resumed the election timetable, as set out on the agenda, for the 2 vacant posts as ordinary member of the Executive Committee.

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, explained that the Election Note, sent out by the Joint Secretaries and published on the website, sets out the rules for standing as a candidate and voting in elections. Both nomination and candidacy forms can be requested from the secretariat.

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, reminded members of the Association's rules regarding diversity of gender, geographical spread and language (English and French) on the Executive Committee.

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, reminded colleagues that under the ASGP rules, members with more than 2 years of unpaid membership fees will have their right to vote suspended by the Executive Committee and cannot stand for election. Members with more than 3 years unpaid fees can have their membership suspended, which means they would not be admitted to future meetings.

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, reminded members that a voting substitution form must be submitted to the secretariat by 2.30pm on Tuesday 8 April.

4. Orders of the day

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, invited members to review the draft Orders of the Day, which had been approved by the Executive Committee, and were available on the website and via QR codes on screens in the plenary room.

He reminded colleagues to check the website regularly, as modifications do take place.

The agenda for the session was agreed to.

He then recalled that the usual ASGP session times are from 10:00 to 12:30 in the morning and from 14:30 to 17:30 in the afternoon. He reminded colleagues of the speaking limits and said that they would be strictly enforced:

- **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.

Finally, he invited members to begin thinking about themes and general debates for the next session in Tashkent, in April 2025.

5. Interpretation

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, informed members that interpretation for the session is provided in English and French by the ASGP, in Arabic with thanks to the Association of Arab Parliaments and in Portuguese and Turkish as sponsored by national parliaments. He then thanked the interpreters, who make ASGP meetings possible.

6. Collaboration with the IPU

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, set out the different points of collaboration with the IPU, as listed on the ASGP agenda.

7. Presentation on the parliamentary system in Uzbekistan from Mr Qudrat Nurullaev, Secretary General of the Senate of Uzbekistan

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, invited Mr Qudrat Nurullaev to come to the stage and open the session.

Mr Qudrat Nurullaev, Secretary General of the Senate of Uzbekistan, began his speech by warmly greeting President José Pedro Montero, fellow parliamentarians, and the citizens of his country.

He welcomed Uzbekistan's membership of the ASGP.

He emphasized that, under the presidency of Mr Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan is currently undertaking extensive reforms in all areas. He mentioned the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy, which provides for economic recovery, the strengthening of public services in the areas of education, health, and social protection, and the creation of a fair and citizen-centred state. He emphasized the close link between these transformations and the central role of parliament in the development of a democratic state.

He explained that the Uzbek parliament played an active role in creating and stabilizing the legal foundations necessary for these reforms. The parliament also works to protect the rights of citizens, particularly the most vulnerable, and supports social, economic, and environmental development.

He then discussed the structure of the Uzbek parliamentary system and reiterated the central role of parliament in the legislative process. He emphasized the importance of citizen participation in the legislative process.

He then discussed the progress made in parliamentary organization. He said the Senate's services have evolved considerably, incorporating a modern approach to parliamentary management. He mentioned the mobilization of 40 to 60 people in specialized services (analysis, information, organization) and the Senate's involvement in concrete actions against corruption, for gender equality, and in monitoring the implementation of sustainable development goals.

He explained that the Senate cooperates with national committees, independent expert groups, and various institutional partners. He also mentioned that parliamentary meetings can now be held electronically, saving time and resources. The digital parliament is now operational.

He mentioned that a new format for regional meetings between the parliaments of Central Asia had been launched in September, with the aim of strengthening the exchange of positive experiences and mutual understanding between states.

In conclusion, he reiterated the Uzbek parliament's commitment to opening up to other parliaments and invited the assembly to come and discover the work of his country's Senate. He thanked President José Pedro Montero and the ASGP secretariat for organizing this session.

Mr Simon Burton, UK, asked whether the upper house of Oliy Majilis could amend legislation?

Mr Qudrat Nurullaev, Uzbekistan, responded that negotiations between the two chambers often happen over legislation, when laws come from the lower chamber the senate must revise it within a certain time frame, 60 days. Within 60 days the Senate will give its feedback on the legislation, stating whether they object or confirm the legislative proposal. If the senators object, then there are two possibilities. A Consultative Commission can be set up with members from both the upper and lower chamber to review the law. Alternatively, without creating a Consultative Commission the senate can object to the law. The Senate decides when to create a Commission by examining whether it's urgent and whether the laws are particularly important. In the commission, senators and deputies work together to decide whether to adopt the measure.



THEME: IN THE NEWS AND INNOVATIONS AT PARLIAMENT

8. Communication: H.E Mohamed Ebrahim Alsisi Alboainain, Council of Representatives of Bahrain, on 'Harnessing Artificial Intelligence in the Bahraini Parliament: Towards a Transformative Shift in Innovation'

H.E Mohammed Ebrahim Alsisi Alboainain presented the following communication:

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Peace, Mercy and Blessings of Allah be upon you,

It is a great pleasure to be with you today at this significant meeting which reflects the importance of technological development in the parliamentary field at the global level. In the Kingdom of Bahrain, we always put innovation in the core of our strategies, and we strive to achieve an ambitious national vision that relies on digital transformation in all sectors, including the parliamentary work, and out of our full realization that leveraging modern era's tools like artificial intelligence is no longer a choice, but rather an urgency to improve the efficiency of parliamentary performance, in addition to ensuring transparency and accountability in all phases of legislative work.

It is important to have a serious discussion regarding the role of artificial intelligence in enhancing effective communication methods among citizens and legislative institutions. Whereas, due to its ability in processing and analyzing massive amounts of data, artificial intelligence could be an effective inductive tool in stimulating ideas and providing deeper visions on subjects of interest to the citizens, therefore enhancing the quality and effectiveness of participation. Furthermore, artificial intelligence could be an important tool in stimulating general participation and making it further comprehensive and faster.

Distinguished Attendees,

In implementation of the royal vision of His Majesty King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa, King of the country, which aims to promote the position of the Kingdom of Bahrain as a pioneering center in digital innovation in the region, and with the support of His Royal Highness Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister, the legislative authority of the Kingdom of Bahrain seeks to integrate advanced technological solutions in all its work fields.

Through adopting digital transformation, the parliamentary efforts focus on improving E-Services through the usage of artificial intelligence technologies in order to facilitate communication with citizens and to provide effective and detailed information on legislations, draft laws and the achievements of both chambers. This evolution includes developing an intelligent digital infrastructure for indexing parliamentary documents, which contributes to enhancing interaction between Their Excellencies Member of Parliaments and the community. In addition, the General Secretariat continues to conduct specialized training workshops to qualify its staff in using artificial intelligence technologies which enhance the efficiency of parliamentary performance and contribute to achieving the highest levels of productivity and proficiency at work.

Moreover, the legislative authority has adopted the strategy of digital transformation, artificial intelligence and route map for five years, and the ethical directive principles have been developed to ensure the responsible usage of artificial intelligence and other digital technologies. Additionally, a committee has been established to oversee the digital and artificial intelligence initiatives and to ensure compliance with the ethical standards and the legal regulations.

Distinguished Attendees,

In this context, the Council of Representatives of the Kingdom of Bahrain, presided by His Excellency Ahmed Bin Salman Al Musalam, provides a pioneering model in using artificial intelligence in accordance with the ambitious technological plans of the Kingdom in enhancing innovation and adopting latest digital technologies. Therefore, a group of projects aiming to develop the parliamentary work and further enhance its efficiency have been implemented.

These initiatives include digital transformation in managing sittings, developing the E-Systems that allow Members of Parliaments to follow up the agendas and overlooking parliamentary documents digitally, which contribute to accelerating procedures and reducing reliance on paper. Furthermore, artificial intelligence projects that support decision making and data analysis have been developed, such as the Parliamentary Counselor Platform, which provides detailed answers on legislations based on an expanded database, and an advanced system to analyze parliamentary proposals. These projects represent a strategic step toward improving the parliamentary work and raising its efficiency. These projects are based on a specific timetable that includes phases of analyzing, developing and testing in order to ensure the application of solutions efficiently and effectively.

Specialized training programs are also provided to ensure the understanding of all users to the modern systems and leveraging innovative technologies to their fullest. Moreover, the performance is reviewed periodically to ensure the projects align with the actual needs of the council. The General Secretariat of the Council of Representatives continues to enhance its efforts in applying artificial intelligence and the latest digital technologies with the aim of improving parliamentary work transparency, accelerating procedures and promoting community engagement in decision making, which contributes to building an intelligent and advanced parliamentary environment, achieving the highest levels of efficiency and effectiveness.

Distinguished Colleagues,

We believe that we need to extend bridges of cooperation and knowledge exchange with the State Members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. In addition to sharing experiences and exchanging knowledge between parliaments in the field of artificial intelligence which will have a great positive impact on enhancing parliamentary performance in all parliaments of the world. We hope that these discussions will be a starting point for a long-lasting cooperation among parliaments in using modern technologies to achieve the ultimate benefit for the communities.

In conclusion, we assure you that the Council of Representatives of the Kingdom of Bahrain will remain committed to pushing the wheel of digital innovation in the parliamentary work, and we will work hard to employ artificial intelligence to achieve further transparency and efficiency in the legislative process, considering it a strategic step toward building a parliamentary community that is more developed and partnered with citizens.

Thank you all for listening, and I look forward to the joint cooperation to achieve further success in using artificial intelligence to improve the parliamentary

Mr Nayef Al-Mahmoud, Qatar, informed the Association that he had recently visited Bahrain to see the use of AI in parliament, he commented the technology was at a very advanced level. He complimented the administration on its zero use of paper.

Mr Salim Djalal, Algeria, also complimented the use of AI in the Bahrain parliament to improve the function of work. He noted that using AI is a double-edged sword, with both positive and negative consequences. He asked how the ethics committee in Bahrain deals with the dangers which emanate from the use of AI? Where the ethical document is not respected by users, how are cases dealt with?

H.E Mohammed Ebrahim Alsis Alboainain, Bahrain, responded that the parliament had strived very hard, during and after the pandemic, which led to a rapid transformation, a quick process to adopting AI. He said the parliament was very aware of ethical issues. He assured the Association there is still some human oversight in the use of the AI but less oversight than before. He commented that the use of anything new will always include some danger. He concluded that Bahrain is attempting to prevent dangers, it's use of AI is at an advanced level and acknowledged this requires constant amendment and vigilance.



9. Communication: Mr Dan Marzouk, Knesset of Israel, on 'Smart Agenda for Plenary Sessions and Virtual Tabling'

Mr Dan Marzouk, presented the following communication:

Introduction

Parliaments are inherently conservative institutions. Centuries-old parliamentary traditions have shaped work patterns that often remain unchanged. While preserving tradition is important, it can also pose a barrier to innovation. The Knesset (the Israeli Parliament), despite being relatively young, is no exception in this regard.

In this lecture, I will present a flagship project we led in the Knesset regarding the management of the plenary agenda and the accessibility of parliamentary documents using advanced technology. The aim is to make parliamentary work more efficient, transparent, and accessible.

The Challenge: Parliamentary Agenda in the Technological Era

Every parliament has a plenary agenda - a central document outlining the various topics to be discussed in the plenary, and offering the public a window into the parliamentary activity of their elected representatives.

However, many parliaments still publish their agendas the old fashioned way - PDF files or simple HTML pages - that fail to harness the full potential of current technology.

Parliamentary work is dynamic. Agendas often change, including the topics and the identities of the speakers. The use of static formats, as mentioned, does not allow for effective real-time updates.

The Solution: "Smart Agenda"

To address these challenges, the Knesset Secretariat initiated the Smart Agenda project - an innovative digital platform that updates in real-time and provides an abundance of accessible parliamentary information.

Key Stages in the Project's Implementation:

1. Upgrade of technological infrastructure in the plenary - All screens at the Knesset Members' permanent seats in the plenum (also used for electronic voting) were replaced with advanced, fast touchscreens capable of displaying high-quality data.
2. Development of an advanced information management system in the Knesset plenum - A new software was developed that enables the management of all parliamentary information displayed on the Knesset Members' screens in the plenary and presents the Smart Agenda with its various components.
3. External accessibility - A dedicated digital platform was created, allowing the Smart Agenda to be accessed outside the plenary hall, primarily optimized for smartphones.

The project was completed successfully within just one year. Today, the Knesset plenary agenda is published in an advanced and innovative manner, allowing access to parliamentary information that was previously unavailable. The topics presented in the agenda (bills, motions of no-confidence in the government, questions, etc.) are linked, facilitating easy access to the relevant parliamentary documents with a single click.

The Smart Agenda also includes summaries of various topics and information about the Knesset Members who will speak during each debate, according to the order in which they are scheduled to speak in the plenary. The Smart Agenda is synchronized with the Knesset Members attendance board, so if an MK scheduled to speak in the plenum is absent, their name will appear dimmed in the agenda.

The Smart Agenda also provides real-time indicators of the current topic under discussion and the speaker addressing the plenary at any given moment. The platform also includes advanced search options within the agenda, based on keywords, Knesset Member names, and more.

Challenges and Solutions

The path to innovation was not simple. We encountered two main challenges:

1. Cyber security - Securing data traffic between the Knesset Secretariat and the plenary. Through a determined effort to find a professional solution and with the help of skilled Knesset IT personnel, we overcame this challenge and created continuous data traffic between the Secretariat and the Knesset plenary while maintaining the highest level of cyber security.
2. Organizational adaptation - Overcoming resistance to change among users accustomed to old working methods. Through the user experience and the system's inherent advantages, we have succeeded in making the Smart Agenda a widely used fundamental tool.

Virtual Knesset Table

We did not stop there. The Knesset is currently promoting a complementary project titled the "Virtual Knesset Table". Like many parliaments, the Knesset handles a large number of documents in the plenary, making it difficult to track them effectively.

Placing documents on the parliament table is an ancient practice that will continue to accompany us in the future. We believed it was time to transform this process to align with the current era. Consequently, the Knesset is developing a digital platform that will aggregate all documents placed on the Knesset table, allowing them to be accessed from anywhere and at any time.

The documents will be categorized, and intelligent search will be available based on the time of tabling, names of relevant Knesset Members, and more. A virtual parliament table is an essential feature in modern parliaments, though it is currently only found in a few.

Conclusion: The Importance of Parliamentary Innovation

The tension between preserving parliamentary tradition and embracing technological innovation will remain an ongoing challenge in the future.

This is where the ASGP plays a crucial role. Changing times, technological advancements, growing public engagement, and the fast-paced nature of events in the modern world, along with the emerging era of artificial intelligence, require us to think collectively about how to adapt the work of parliaments to the modern age.

Such a change is not merely a technicality - it is fundamental. As we advance innovative solutions, we will be able to streamline parliamentary work, thereby strengthening our democracies.

Mr Roy Ngulube, Zambia, commented that in Zambia the Standing Orders state that the Order Paper cannot be changed less than 2 hours before the business commences. This rule protects both sides, opposition and government, as it gives each enough time to prepare their response and prevents the ambush of important topics being raised without notice. He asked whether there was any time limit on when Israel's order paper, the 'smart agenda, could be changed?

Mr Georg Kleemann, asked whether voting in the Knesset is done digitally, in-person in the chamber or remotely?

Mr Kennedy Mugove, Zimbabwe, asked about how the Secretary General overcame resistance to change in the Knesset when introducing the smart agenda.

Mr Pramod Chandra Mody, India, asked how and when the names of speakers in debates were decided and reflected in the smart agenda.

Mr Dan Marzouk replied that the agenda is always updated, even during the session, it can be live updated. He said all changes are immediately reflected in the smart agenda. The idea is to reflect, on the agenda, exactly what is happening and what will happen in the chamber. He observed that all members and staff now constantly check their smart agenda on their phones to understand what is happening in the Knesset.

In response to Mr Kleeman, he said voting in the Knesset is done electronically. It is possible to do 'name by name' voting but it only happens when the Government or the MPs request to do a vote by signature.

In response to Mr Mugove, he said there was great resistance to change in the Knesset but as a professional staff, the secretariat wanted to lead change even though it was not easy. Although they overcame many of the challenges, he said some members still ask for the PDF file of the agenda but he anticipated these members will soon learn to adjust their work to the new technology.

In response to Mr Mody, he said the decision of who speaks in the plenary session is made by the Speaker. Usually, the Speaker knows in advance who will speak because it depends on the size of the party. On other days, all the members can talk and the order of the members on the speaking list is managed on a 'first come first served' basis. He noted the value of a smart agenda is that you can see at every moment who will speak next, it allows members to calculate the likely length of time for their speech.

Dr José Pedro Montero, President, thanked the speaker for an interesting presentation. Responding to an incident in the room during Mr Marzouk's presentation, he then reminded all members of the Association that the ASGP is not a political forum. He said that he had his own private views on the Middle East but that the ASGP is a forum of Secretaries Generals who discuss parliamentary affairs as colleagues. The IPU is the forum for political discussion.



10. Concluding remarks

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, thanked all the speakers. He reminded the Association to meet at 2pm in front of the Fairmont Hotel for the afternoon visit to the Parliament of Uzbekistan.

He closed the sitting.

THE SITTING ENDED AT 12.15PM.

SECOND SITTING

Monday 7 April 2025 (morning)

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President in the Chair

THE SITTING WAS OPENED AT 10.10AM

1. Introductory remarks

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, warmly welcomed members of the Association and offered thanks on behalf of the Association for the excellent visit yesterday to the Parliament of Uzbekistan.

2. Elections

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, recalled the timetable for the election and reminded members that, under the Association's rules, the Executive Committee should be gender balanced and representative, as far as possible, of the different official languages and geographical regions of the Association. He described the current composition of the Executive Committee.

3. GENERAL DEBATE with informal discussion groups: Parliament and citizen participation (eg. Citizens Assembly, petitions)

Mr Najib El Khadi, introduced the General Debate in the following terms:

He thanked the President and expressed his pleasure at returning to this assembly, which he described as the elite of national parliament staff around the world.

Firstly, he emphasized the specific nature of parliamentary institutions and the need to adapt training programs to this particular audience. He invited members to consult two papers he had presented at previous ASGP sessions, one on the sociology of parliamentarians (October 2015) and the other on the role of the Secretary General (2017), in which he questioned whether the role of the Secretary General of a parliament was strictly administrative or whether it also had a political dimension.

Secondly, he stated that any training program within parliamentary institutions should draw on parliamentary memory, best practices, and legal and procedural precedents in order to best meet the specific requirements and expectations of each institution. Referring to a literary reference, he shared a quote from the Portuguese

novelist José Saramago, taken from the novel *Blindness*, in which the author states that “if we can see, we must look; and if we look, we must watch.” He explained that watching means comparing, observing, paying attention to expectations, and that this makes it possible to avoid the forms of blindness denounced by the thinker Edgar Morin in *Lessons from a Century of Life*.

Finally, he recalled that the training of parliamentary staff must be contextualized and adapted to needs that are not only technical but also cultural. Training must enable the development of competent parliamentary staff who are connected to global concerns, in tune with the spirit of the times, and able to meet the practical requirements of the parliamentary institution in all its aspects.

Addressing his colleagues, he proposed opening the discussion on several questions: What is the content of the training offered to parliamentary staff? What is the mechanism for transferring knowledge and good practices in this area? What type of training are parliaments moving towards: academic and theoretical training provided by universities and colleges, or practical training based on the daily experience of parliamentary work, as practiced by parliamentary officials themselves?

He invited participants to continue the discussion in language groups (French, English, Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese), emphasizing that the resulting reports would add significant value to the overall debate. Finally, he reminded participants that these reports would be presented collectively after an hour and a half of work.

- What training and development opportunities are provided for parliamentary staff?
- Does your parliament pay for external training or sponsor further academic or professional qualifications for parliamentary staff?
- Does your parliament support secondments for parliamentary staff to expand their experience?
- Do you provide formal training or is the expectation that parliamentary staff learn their role through apprenticeship with senior colleagues?
-

****The members divided into 5 language-based groups - English, French, Arabic and Spanish/Portuguese - to discuss the general debate topic. ****

***Each group nominated a rapporteur to give a speech reflecting on the group discussion to the main plenary. ***

** The following individuals were nominated as rapporteurs. Sarah Davies (UK) and Simon Burton (UK) represented the English-speaking groups. Mr Mohammed Albuainain, Bahrain represented the Arab-speaking group. Ms Valérie Simporé-Soubeiga (Burkina Faso) represented the French speaking group. Mr Pedro de Neri represented the Portuguese/Spanish speaking group. **

Mr Najib El Khadi, Moderator, warmly thanked the rapporteurs. He highlighted the specific nature of initial and continuing training within parliaments, emphasizing the importance of soft skills and the need to adapt training programs to the challenges specific to certain periods or regions. In particular, he stressed that, in the current context, training in combating fake news and using artificial intelligence was essential.

He then reiterated the importance of study visits between parliamentary institutions, which he would like to see encouraged more, particularly at the regional level.

He concluded by reiterating the need to strengthen links between parliamentary institutions and research centres. He emphasized that the perspective of scholars and universities allows parliamentary staff to look at certain issues from a different angle.

Finally, he made two proposals: first, that the IPU and the ASGP should jointly develop a standard training model adapted to parliamentary institutions; and second, that the creation of training centres within parliamentary institutions should be encouraged.

4. Concluding remarks

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, thanked all members for participating in a full and interesting debate. He reminded colleagues that buses for the visit to the Navruz Ethnographic Park would depart at 14.00

THE SITTING ENDED AT 12.35PM

THIRD SITTING

Tuesday 8 April 2025 (morning)

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President in the Chair

THE SITTING WAS OPENED AT 10.10AM

1. Introductory remarks

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, welcomed everyone back to the fourth sitting of the ASGP. He announced, with great sadness, the death of Mr Roy Ngulube, Clerk of the National Assembly of Zambia, the previous evening.

The Association held a minutes' silence in honour of Mr Ngulube.

2. Orders of the Day

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President announced that the Executive Committee had approved a request to amend the agenda to allow Ms Fathimah Niusha of the Maldives to present her communication on Tuesday April 8 in the afternoon rather than Wednesday 9 April in the morning.

3. Election

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, announced that, as there were 3 candidates for 2 vacant posts on the Executive Committee, an election would take place at 2.30pm this afternoon.

He reminded colleagues about the deadlines for anyone wishing to stand as a candidate or nominate a substitute to vote.

THEME: MEETING THE EXPECTATIONS OF YOUNG PARLIAMENTARIANS

3. Communication by Mr Mahmoud Ismail Etman, Egyptian Senate

Mr Mahmoud Ismail Etman spoke as follows:

Mr. President

Dear Colleagues

There is no doubt that youth participation in parliamentary work is a fundamental pillar for strengthening democracy and rejuvenating political life. This participation ensures more inclusive representation of a large segment of society

and enables those young people to contribute to the formulation of legislation and the adoption of policies that meet their needs and aspirations, as their aspirations and opinions are part of the decision-making process. Moreover, Youth involvement in parliamentary work also reinforces the values of democracy and citizenship and encourages young people to give more concern to public affairs.

On the other hand, empowering youth to participate effectively in parliamentary work contributes to bridging the generation gap, resulting in legislation and policies that are more compatible with the demands and needs of different age groups. It also contributes to advocating for youth issues and problems, such as education, health, and employment, and offers innovative ideas and solutions. It also allows those young people to gain the political and parliamentary experience that qualifies them to become future leaders.

Dear Guests

There is no doubt that the increasing number of young parliamentarians is a positive indicator of the openness of political systems and their commitment to renewal and injecting new blood into the policy-making and legislative drafting process.

Therefore, Article 244 of the Egyptian Constitution stipulates that the state shall work to ensure appropriate representation of youth in Parliament.

However, there is a need to provide an environment that supports the aspirations and demands of young parliamentarians and helps them achieve their goals and participate effectively in parliamentary work. This can be achieved through several initiatives, including:

- Organizing comprehensive training programs aimed at familiarizing young parliamentarians with parliamentary procedures and how to handle legislative and oversight tools, while leveraging the expertise of former parliamentarians to provide guidance and direction.
- Promoting youth participation in parliamentary committees and ensuring their representation.
- Providing resources and logistical support to assist young parliamentarians in the preparation of research and the proposal of policies.
- Involving young parliamentarians in international parliamentary conferences and events, enabling them to exchange expertise with their counterparts from other countries and benefit from successful experiences.

- Promoting dialogue, within the parliament, between young and experienced parliamentarians, to exchange views, achieve common understanding, and create a more harmonious working environment.
- Adopting policies and strategies that support youth participation in political and parliamentary work to ensure that they are empowered to perform their roles effectively.

The Egyptian Parliament boasts significant youth representation, as the number of young people in the Senate has reached 30 members. The state has also placed great emphasis on empowering youth and building bridges of communication with them through youth conferences, which have subsequently transformed into a global icon, through the announcement of the World Youth Forum. The World Youth Forum has become an international platform for dialogue and communication among youth from various countries, with a view to enrich the minds and thoughts of young people, build a generation capable of facing future challenges, and convey to the world a message of peace, love, and development from the land of Egypt.

Furthermore, the Egyptian state, through the Ministry of Youth and Sports, has adopted a simulation model of the Egyptian Senate, featuring non-parliamentary youth. This model aims to qualify and train young people and prepare them for future engagement in parliamentary work, refining their skills and experience. This is achieved through numerous specialized training courses, workshops and immersion sessions, organized for members of the model with the Senate, to learn about the mechanisms of parliamentary work and benefit from the expertise of researchers in the secretariats of standing committees in preparing reports and how to deal with legislative and oversight procedures.

At the international level, the Senate has hosted, over the course of three years, 450 young leaders from various countries with diverse cultural backgrounds. These young leaders are participants in the Nasser Fellowship for International Leadership, in the framework of the efforts to enhance the role of youth globally. The Senate has provided in that context various forms of support, qualification and training to these young people, under the directives of His Excellency President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

In conclusion, I can only extend my deepest thanks and gratitude to all of you for your keenness to listen and participate actively.
I wish you all the best.

Ms Sarah Davies, UK, remarked that it was very interesting to hear about Egypt's experience with a youth parliament. She enquired what efforts were made to ensure

the Youth Parliament is representative of different demographics and populations. In the UK, she said they have found the Youth Parliament tends to attract young people who are already very engaged in politics.

Mr Pedro de Neri, Angola, asked how decisions of the youth parliament handled?

Mr Salim DJALAL, Algeria, said the President of the Youth Network in Algeria was appointed by election, the young members elected the Speaker, then a programme was put in place after the young people had met with the Ministers of Youth and Sport, Labour and Solidarity. They also met with the President of the socio-economic council. As a result of these meetings, several days of debate were undertaken on issues of interest to youth. The Speaker would regularly hold meetings focussed on youth issues, these young people participated in those meetings. In future, Algeria has plans to arrange regional workshops which bring together young parliamentarians to deliberate on matters that are a priority for the youth in the country.

Mr Mahmoud Ismail Etman, replied to Ms Davies that the young people are selected to represent the whole of the country, and come from each region. In response to Mr Neri, he said the model of the youth parliament is adopted by the Ministry of Sports and Youth, it is not a formal parliament with decision-making power. It is aimed at preparing the MPs of the future and simulates the work of the senate. He said that in Egypt there are 27 provinces and young people are elected through the youth directorate in each province, ensuring representation of the whole country. The young people present their candidacy for election in the same way as those of real MPs. He remarked it is a good simulation of the real process. Similarly, the young parliamentarians are formed into 14 committees and attend an opening ceremony which also simulates the real process in the senate. However, he reiterated that these sessions don't have any real power. The Senate hosts the young parliamentarians and loans its staff to the programme because the Senate believes it is a good initiative. The young parliamentarians have established an informal entity known as the "Youth Co-ordinating Body" which represents their aspirations but without political affiliation. He concluded by saying that Egyptian law stipulates that at the opening session, the senior member presides assisted by the youngest member. This rule enabled young people to feel very involved in the process of parliament.



4. Communication by Ms Steejit Taipiboonsuk, House of Representatives of Thailand

Ms Steejit Taipiboonsuk, presented the following communication:

Mr. President,

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the Thai delegation to ASGP, this is my honor and privilege to be here with you today to discuss the theme of “Meeting the expectations of young parliamentarians”. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you how the House of Representatives of Thailand transforms to meet the expectations of young MPs and move towards a more inclusive and representative parliament.

1. Introduction

We all acknowledge, as represented by the IPU’s Indicators for Democratic Parliaments, that parliaments should be inclusive, participatory and representative, among others. Parliaments cannot be inclusive and participatory if they do not involve all segments of society, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as youth. Parliaments cannot be representative, if the members of parliament are not socially and politically represented.

We still have a long way to go, as half of the world population are under age 30, but less than 3% of parliamentarians around the world represent this age group.

2. Statistics on Thailand’s Young Parliamentarians

The 122nd IPU Assembly in 2010 in Bangkok adopted a major resolution on Youth Participation in the Democratic Process, which led to the creation of the IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians in 2013. The resolution advocates for boosting youth participation in democracy and, among other things, recommends that parliaments align the minimum voting age with the minimum age of eligibility to run for office in order to ensure greater participation by youth in parliaments. As for Thailand, the voting age is 18, while you have to be at least 25 years old to be eligible to run for an office of a member of the House of Representatives.

The last 3 General Elections see increasing proportion of young parliamentarians in the House.

To illustrate, the election in 2014 resulted in no parliamentarians under the age of 30, 40 or 50. The average age was 64.1 years old.

The general election in 2019 resulted in **26.40% of the members of the House were under the age of 45**, 16.60% under the age of 40 and 2.40% under the age of 30, and brought the average age down to 54.

With the latest General Election in 2023, **43% were under the age of 45**, 29.20% under the age of 40 and 6.40% under the age of 30, lowering the average age to 50.81.

3. Platforms or Mechanisms for Young MPs

It is important to evolve the institution of parliament to accommodate the aspiration and expectations of young parliamentarians. Since the general election in 2019 that saw the increasing number of young parliamentarians, Thailand has co-created or participated in platforms or mechanisms of community for young MPs; for example, Thailand's Young Parliamentarians Caucus, the Meeting of Young Parliamentarians of AIPA, and the IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians.

3.1 Young Parliamentarians Caucus of Thailand

The National Assembly of Thailand established its Young Parliamentarians Caucus of Thailand in 2020. It consists of young MPs under the age of 45 from both the House and the Senate. Its objective is to promote the engagement, communications and leadership of young MPs. The members of the Caucus have been actively participating in the international forums for young MPs, such as IPU and AIPA.

3.2 The IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians

Thailand has joined other national parliaments in promoting the IPU's "I Say Yes to Youth in Parliament!" campaign since 2021. The six pledges on the campaign have been adopted, which are promoting youth quotas, aligning the age of eligibility with that of voting, supporting youth channels in parliament, empowering young parliamentarians, mentoring young aspirants, and advocating for youth participation.

From 2021 to 2023, Mr. Issara Sereewatthanawut, a former MP and member of the Young Parliamentarians Caucus of Thailand, had a privilege to serve as a Member of the Board of the IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians. Other young MPs have also been actively participating in meetings and workshops arranged by the IPU, especially IPU Online trainings for young parliamentarians.

The year 2018 was when IPU started encouraging more young MPs to attend its meetings, by allowing Member Parliaments to register one additional delegate if at least one young MP is part of the delegation. Since then, Thai young MPs have always been included in each and every Thai Parliamentary Delegation to attend IPU Assemblies.

3.3 The Meeting of Young Parliamentarians of AIPA

In accordance with the AIPA Resolution in 2020 on the Engagement of Young Parliamentarians of AIPA in the ASEAN Community Building, Thailand and AIPA Member Parliaments welcome the initiative to establish the Meeting of Young Parliamentarians of AIPA to be held in AIPA General Assemblies. The Meeting of Young Parliamentarians of AIPA was transformed in 2022 into a Standing Committee that is organized annually during the AIPA General Assembly. This committee discusses ways to empower young MPs and generate

transformative change, such as economic transformation, democratic participation and governance, and a more secure, resilient, and inclusive ASEAN Community.

According to the Rules of Procedure of the Meeting of Young Parliamentarians of AIPA, each AIPA Member Parliament shall appoint at least one parliamentarian under the age of 45 as representative to the Meeting of Young Parliamentarians of AIPA. Originally, a proposal was made to define young parliamentarians as those under the age of 50. However, AIPA Member Parliaments later agreed by consensus that young parliamentarians should refer to those under the age of 45. Any further changes would once again require a consensus as per AIPA and ASEAN principle.

4. Young MPs and the work in the House of Representatives

Young leaders bring new and fresh ideas to the work of the parliament, and express particular interests in education, digital transformation, youth engagement, climate change, to name a few. What parliaments should do is support their efforts to shape and lead these agendas, while building trust and ensuring that their needs are represented. Throughout my professional experience of more than 30 years at the Secretariat of the House of Representatives, I have witnessed numerous organizational change and development. Let me share with you what the House of Representatives of Thailand do to amplify youth voice and young MPs' works.

4.1 The organization's vision on SMART Parliament

To achieve the Secretariat of the House of Representatives' vision of becoming smart, agile, and high competency organization, several projects have been carried out to boost the parliamentary personnel training and development. The Secretariat has been privileged to have young MPs' support. For example, when the Secretariat held a contest on public speaking or SMART Talk, some young MPs were invited to be the judges, others attended the event as audience. This allowed exchange of views, comments, and insights between parliamentary officers and young MPs on how to become an effective and inspiring public speaker.

4.2 OPEN Parliament Hackathon

The OPEN Parliament Hackathon was initiated by former First Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives and was held in August 2024. It invited teams of technology enthusiasts from around the country to compete in finding solutions to push forward a digital, transparent, and accessible parliament. The contestants were encouraged to use various software, design a software development plan, or apply AI, Big Data, and Machine Learning to improve parliamentary operations.

It was the first parliament hackathon that made use of real data, such as various draft bills, budgeting proposals, meeting minutes. For this event, several young MPs also volunteered as mentors, brainstorming overnight with around 400

contestants to propose how to positively transform the parliament. The proposed ideas included automatic meeting summary generator, dashboard for parliamentarian performance and attendance, roll call votes by parliamentarians, transparent public procurement, real-time public feedback during parliamentary debates, and streamlined visualization of public expenditure. All of these aim to facilitate the public scrutiny of the parliament.

4.3 AIPA Road Show goes to Thailand

Recently, the Thai House Secretariat and the AIPA Secretariat co-hosted an event “AIPA Road Show goes to Thailand” on 18 March 2025. This collaboration was led by young MPs, who were actively engaged with AIPA. Its objectives were to familiarize the public, especially the youth, with the role of parliamentary diplomacy in the context of ASEAN Community Building.

4.4 The Working Group on Foreign Affairs Strategy

Most recently, a discussion on a long-term and comprehensive foreign affairs strategy for the National Assembly of Thailand has been underway. The working group on foreign affairs strategy has not yet formed. However, the idea is to bring together visionary parliamentarians, including young MPs, to strategize how the parliament engages through parliamentary diplomacy on both bilateral and multilateral levels to advance mutual interests in the international community. By including young MPs, it is to ensure that the ideas and perspectives brought into discussion will be inclusive, participatory, and thorough.

4.5 Enhancing Workplace Wellness

Hon. Mr. Paradorn Prissanantakul, Second Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives and a young MP himself, launched a wellness program to combat Non Communicable Disease (NCD) and transform the workplace into a healthier environment. He presided over the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Secretariat of the House of Representatives and the Department of Health, Ministry of Public Health, on health promotion collaboration. The purpose of the MoU is to collaborate in promoting, and raising awareness about health care, changing health behaviors, and reducing the risk of diseases. It also aims to provide accurate knowledge on nutrition and exercise for health care, as well as to create an environment conducive to good health. This is to encourage members of parliament, and parliamentary staff to achieve good and strong health within a health-friendly environment for long-term sustainability.

Hon. Mr. Paradorn Prissanantakul also supports the Secretariat’s “Special Summer Camp Program for Happiness”. The program provides temporary on-site childcare for the school-age children of parliamentary staff during summer holidays with special activities including both physical and mental development.

Mr. Second Deputy Speaker's remark during the opening ceremony of the program shows that his vision aligns with that of the Secretariat: organizations can expand policies and programs that support the well-being of parents in the workplace. The objectives of the program are to lessen working parents' financial and logistical challenges in securing quality childcare, and to help parents achieve a better work-life balance.

It represents not only a strategic choice to increase job satisfaction, but also, most importantly, a moral imperative to enhance quality of life.

5. Conclusion

The rise of young MPs in Thailand is change agent for the parliamentary transformation. In terms of technology and digital tools, incorporating modern digital tools into parliamentary processes can enhance productivity and allow young MPs to engage with their constituencies and colleagues seamlessly. Parliamentary officers are required to reskill and upskill in order to keep up the pace with active young MPs.

Young MPs also represent diverse groups, including different genders, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. It is essential to foster an inclusive atmosphere where all voices, including those of marginalized groups, are respected and heard. More importantly, young MPs often have a global perspective and are influenced by trends in other countries. Encouraging participation in international forums and exchanges can help broaden their perspectives and enhance their ability to create innovative solutions. Thank you.

Mr Syed Hasnain Haider, Pakistan, asked her opinion whether there should be reserved seats for young parliamentarians?

Mr Talip Uzun, Türkiye, said that in Türkiye there is also a forum for young parliamentarians. However, there are also around 200 young MPs who are under 40 years old. He asked for Steejit's opinion on how to manage the case of a young MP, a 24-year-old parliamentarian, who has become a mother?

Mr Simon Burton, UK, remarked on Steejit's comments that young MPs in Thailand have taken an interest in the wellbeing and health of parliamentary staff. In the House of Lords, he said the average age of members is 71. He said there is an informal working group where staff and Lords can work together on wellbeing issues. He asked whether the change achieved in Thailand happened via formal structures, such as a working group or committee, or more informally?

Mr Masibulele Xaso, South Africa, said that in South Africa there had been efforts to establish a young persons caucus but this had not succeeded. He asked whether the forum in Thailand is set out in the rules of the Parliament and whether Steejit could share the terms of reference for the Youth Parliament. He also asked what becomes of the deliberations or recommendations from the youth parliament?

Ms Steejit Taipiboonsuk, Thailand, responded that there are no reserved seats in parliament for young MPs. She said the young MPs work very hard and have won votes from young people which means their number is increasing.

In response to Mr Uzun, she said in Thailand there are breast-feeding rooms for female MPs and they are trying to create an after-school club for the children of staff. At the moment, there are no young children being brought to the meeting rooms.

In response to Mr Burton, she said there is no formal group looking at the wellbeing of staff. It is an informal process due to closer relationships between the staff and younger members.

In response to Mr Xaso, she said it took a long time to arrange the youth parliament. She explained the initiative to young parliamentarians, discussed the idea with the President and now it is in the rules of the Parliament.



5. Communication by Mr Safwan Basheer Al Gergeri, Council of Representatives of Iraq

Mr Safwan Basheer Al Gergeri presented the following communication:

Youth participation in parliaments is essential to ensuring equitable representation of diverse segments of society and promoting the principles of democracy and good governance. Young people, who make up a large portion of the world's population, bring new energy and ideas that contribute to advancing development. However, their representation in legislative assemblies remains limited in many countries, raising questions about the extent of equal opportunity and the ability of democratic institutions to adapt to the diversity of society and its changing needs.

The presence of young people in parliaments is not limited to simply increasing their numbers in legislative assemblies. It is also about ensuring that their voices are heard in decision-making, on the one hand, and that policies that reflect their needs and aspirations are put in place, on the other.

In this presentation, entitled “Empowering young people in parliaments: a step towards a more democratic future,” we will examine the importance of youth participation in parliaments, the benefits to society of their involvement in the political process, and the challenges they face. We will also discuss youth participation in the Iraqi Council of Representatives, which has seen significant development over the last five parliamentary sessions, with an increase in the percentage of young people under the age of 45.

However, gaps in representation remain between different age groups, as well as between men and women. We will also provide recommendations for improving youth participation and enabling them to play a more active role in political decision-making. Supporting youth participation in parliaments not only strengthens democracy, but also helps build more sustainable and just societies that can meet future challenges with a spirit of innovation and change.

The total number of young participants of both sexes in the five parliamentary cycles was 673, or 42.4% of the total. Men accounted for 69.53% of young participants, while women accounted for 3,046. Participation in the 40-45 age group accounted for 60.47%, while participation in the 30-39 age group accounted for 39.52%. Participation also increased among young people under the age of 45. The 40-45 age group saw the fastest growth in parliamentary participation, compared to the 30-39 age group.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen youth participation in national parliaments
1. Empower women
1. Achieve age balance

Conclusion:

Youth participation in the Iraqi Council of Representatives has seen positive developments over the last five parliamentary cycles, with a significant increase in representation of the 40-45 age group.

This is due to:

- Supporting existing legislation and laws that address youth concerns;
- Supporting young parliamentarians to chair parliamentary committees;
- Supporting the participation of young parliamentarians in parliamentary sessions (attendance + interventions);
- Supporting the contributions of young parliamentarians to the drafting or proposing of laws in various sectors.

In conclusion, we thank the General Secretariat of the Association of Secretaries General of National Parliaments for giving me the opportunity to share with my colleagues the most important current and future issues affecting the development process.

I thank my fellow secretaries and distinguished participants for your kind attention.



6. Communication by Mr Kennedy M Chokuda, Parliament of Zimbabwe

Mr Kennedy M Chokuda presented the following communication:

Background

The history of Zimbabwe is engraved with the indelible mark of youth activism. From the liberation struggle to contemporary movements for social justice, young people have consistently demonstrated their capacity to drive societal progress. This history of activism underscores the significance of promoting a culture of political engagement among the youth. Youth participation in governance goes beyond symbolic representation, it is a fundamental pillar of a truly inclusive democracy. Young people bring critical attributes that are essential to modern governance including innovative thinking, technological proficiency, and forward-looking perspectives that are crucial for addressing contemporary societal challenges. Their active engagement ensures that public discourse evolves in harmony with the rapidly changing needs of society. In Zimbabwe, this principle is particularly significant given the demographic reality that youth under 25 constitute nearly 60% of the population. This demographic composition demands a strategic and deliberate approach to integrate young voices into legislative processes, policy development, and decision-making mechanisms that directly impact their lives and communities.

Zimbabwe's youth represent a powerful catalyst for political and social transformation. As Nelson Mandela aptly observed, "*The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow.*"¹ Indeed, their participation in governance extends beyond satisfying the representative role of Parliament. In fact, it is instrumental in constructing a sustainable national future and promulgating legislation that genuinely reflects the diverse needs of our society. Despite comprising nearly 60% of the population², young people remain miserably underrepresented in governance

¹ [Nelson Mandela's address to the youth - NMF Archive](#)

² Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT, 2019)

structures. This stark disparity highlights an urgent need for systemic reforms and proactive strategies designed to bridge the existing participation gap and fully leverage the potential of our youth.

As the bastion of democratic governance, Parliament must play a vanguard role in addressing critical national imbalances, with youth participation being at the forefront of this challenge. Through legislative interventions, targeted reforms, comprehensive mentorship programmes, and inclusive dialogue platforms, Parliament can effectively empower young people to become meaningful contributors to the governance framework of the nation. The institution must deliberately create pathways that enable young leaders to develop and represent the aspirations of Zimbabwe's youth. In a word, Parliament must cultivate a democratic ecosystem where young voices are not just heard, but genuinely integrated into the decision-making process. In my view, the mandate of Parliament is clear and unambiguous. The institution must nurture, support, and enhance the potential of young leaders and ensure that they have the tools, opportunities, and platforms to shape the future of the nation.

Legal Framework Governing Youth Participation in Zimbabwe

The Constitution of Zimbabwe stands as a powerful testament to the principle of democratic inclusivity, guaranteeing every citizen regardless of age, a fundamental right to participate in governance. Section 20(1) embodies this commitment, and establishes a progressive framework that ensures comprehensive civic engagement across all segments of society by mandating that *“The State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must take reasonable measures, including affirmative action programmes, to ensure that youths, that is to say people between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five years*

(a) have access to appropriate education and training;

(b) have opportunities to associate and to be represented and participate in political, social, economic and other spheres of life³;

This constitutional provision is more than legal text, it is a declaration of democratic values. By explicitly protecting the participatory rights of all citizens, the Constitution creates a foundation for a more representative and responsive system of governance that recognizes the inherent dignity and potential of every individual.

However, translating these constitutional aspirations into tangible reality demanded the creation of mechanisms designed to systematically empower young people. A key strategic intervention, therefore, emerged in the form of the Youth Quota System outlined in section 124(c) of the Constitution, which ensures meaningful youth

³ Constitution of Zimbabwe

representation in national governance structures. It stipulates that “*an additional ten youth members, persons aged 21 to 35 years, one from each of the provinces into which Zimbabwe is divided, will be included*”⁴. This constitutional provision was adopted in the 9th Parliament (2018-2023) to increase the representation of the youth in Parliament and ensure that its composition reflects the country’s demographics.

In addition to constitutional provisions, Parliament enacted the Youth Empowerment Act which is complemented with various policies and regulations that support youth participation. The Youth Empowerment Act, along with initiatives by the Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts, and Recreation are designed to equip young leaders with the necessary skills and resources needed to influence governance and drive national development.

Framework for Youth Participation in Zimbabwe

Portfolio Committee on Youth and the Voluntary Youth Caucus

In order to address the interests of the youth across parliamentary and national domains, Zimbabwe has implemented a multi-faceted approach to youth engagement. These targeted initiatives include establishing a voluntary Youth Caucus, creating a dedicated Portfolio Committee to play an oversight role over the Ministry responsible for youth affairs, implementing a parliamentary youth quota, and introducing the Youth Model Parliament. These platforms collectively create mechanisms for enhancing the participation of young Members of Parliament in legislative processes.

The creation of a voluntary Youth Caucus in 2023, demonstrates the commitment of the Parliament of Zimbabwe to support the needs of the youth. The Youth Caucus offers a platform for young members of Parliament from diverse backgrounds to engage in dialogue, mentorship, and strategic discussions. The Portfolio Committee on Youth, Sport, Arts, and Recreation serves as a critical mechanism for integrating youth perspectives into legislative debates, while simultaneously maintaining rigorous oversight of the Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts, and Recreation. This approach has ensured that the expectations of the youth are addressed at both the executive and legislative levels.

The Concept of the Junior Parliament

In 1991, the Parliament of Zimbabwe collaboration with the Ministry of Youth, established the Junior Parliament as part of a vision for leadership development and to celebrate the Day of the African Child. It was designed to mirror the senior parliamentary structures and serves as a training ground for young leaders. The initiative has provided young representatives from diverse constituencies, a platform

⁴ Constitution of Zimbabwe

to articulate their concerns, advocate for their rights, and contribute to the national discourse on development.

The Budgetary Process

Another critical avenue for addressing the needs of the youth lies in the Budgetary process. The Parliament of Zimbabwe has systematically embedded youth priorities within the national budgetary process. Through carefully structured Pre-Budget Seminar presentations, the Committee on Youth, Sport, Arts, and Recreation and the President of the Junior Parliament have communicated the budgetary proposals of young people to the Minister of Finance and Economic Development. Interestingly, the Minister of Finance has consistently demonstrated responsiveness by incorporating a majority of the recommendations into the National Budget.

Funding of Activities and Parliamentary Assignments

The Parliament of Zimbabwe has demonstrated unwavering commitment to these youth-focused initiatives by consistently allocating resources to both the Committee and the Youth Caucus. The deployment of resources empowers these bodies to execute their mandates effectively to address the unique challenges confronting young leaders. As a deliberate policy directive, youth representation has been integrated across all parliamentary assignments, including international delegations, committee leadership positions, and other critical responsibilities. This deliberate approach has ensured that the demographic diversity of Zimbabwe is truly reflected in key decision-making structures. As a result, young leaders have been occupying key roles such as membership of the Presiding Officers' Panel, Committee chairmanships, and other substantive functions that reinforce their status as active participants in the country's governance landscape.

Adoption of Emerging Technologies to Enhance Youth Participation

In response to the dynamic technological landscape and evolving preferences of young legislators, the Parliament of Zimbabwe has laid the foundation for embracing emerging technologies by crafting the 7th Institutional Strategic Plan (ISP) covering the period 2025 to 2029. The Institutional Strategic Plan focuses on modernizing Parliament to meet contemporary governance challenges through strategic initiatives that embrace modern technologies and Artificial Intelligence. The expectation is that this will lead to more effective youth engagement. Indeed, young parliamentarians continue to demonstrate a clear preference for digital platforms and technological tools in executing their legislative responsibilities. Parliament has implemented a policy of providing specialized ICT gadgets to all Members of Parliament. Furthermore, Parliament has demonstrated a commitment to substantive inclusivity by establishing dedicated breastfeeding spaces to support young women parliamentarians. This initiative has been instrumental in facilitating the continued participation of women legislators and ensured that their contributions remain central to parliamentary discourse.

Success Stories

Notwithstanding significant challenges, Zimbabwe has experienced a remarkable demonstration of young leadership within its parliamentary system. Young Members of Parliament have distinguished themselves as members of the Presiding Officers' Panel and as Ministers within the Executive Branch. The young leaders have initiated groundbreaking programmes in crucial domains like education, technological innovation, and youth employment and proved that leadership potential transcends age limitations. Their achievements illustrate the potential impact of youth participation and provide compelling evidence of the importance of empowering and investing in young political leaders.

Challenges

Despite meaningful progress, young parliamentarians continue to encounter substantial obstacles that significantly restrict their effective engagement in governance processes. Political apathy remains a major barrier, as many young people feel alienated from a system dominated by entrenched political traditions. Resource limitations further compound these challenges, by constraining their capacity to maintain sustained political involvement and reducing their access to mentorship opportunities and essential financial support mechanisms.

Knowledge infrastructure presents an equally formidable challenge to youth political participation. While young Members of Parliament consistently demonstrate remarkable enthusiasm and innovative perspectives, they frequently require extensive orientation and continuous professional development to effectively navigate the complex legislative landscape. However, the high turnover rates among youth parliamentarians disrupts institutional continuity and substantially diminishes the potential long-term impact of their contributions.

Recommendations

In order to ensure meaningful youth involvement in governance, Parliaments must take a comprehensive approach to legislative representation and engagement. The first critical step involves enacting specific legislation that formalizes youth representation, such as establishing a youth quota system. This approach institutionalizes youth presence and provides a structured pathway for meaningful participation in national governance.

Equally important is the strategic placement of young leaders in influential positions within parliamentary committees and other spaces. By deliberately assigning young leaders to key decision-making roles, Parliament can simultaneously develop leadership skills and ensure that young voices directly influence policy formulation. This approach transforms youth representation from a symbolic gesture to a substantive mechanism for innovative governance.

By investing in these strategies, we can create an inclusive political environment that genuinely values and integrates youth perspectives. The goal is not just to include young people, but to empower them as full and active participants in the democratic process.

Conclusion

The potential for young parliamentarians to transform our parliamentary system is beyond debate. They bring fresh perspectives for a more inclusive and innovative future. Empowering them is more than meeting expectations, it is a commitment to national development. I thank you.

Ms Sarah Davies, UK, asked whether the presence of young parliamentarians in the Zimbabwean Parliament had raised any specific challenges, such as changes to dress codes, and how, if so, the administration had overcome them.

Dr Yvonne Umulisa, Rwanda, asked the age of the youngest MP in the Zimbabwean Parliament and whether there are any qualifications required to be an MP?

Mr Kennedy M Chokuda, Zimbabwe, responded to Ms Davies that the rise in young members of parliament has led to many changes to how the parliament does its business. In the past, the Standing Orders did not allow Members to speak from pre-prepared texts. This has been revised to allow young people to read pre-prepared texts. He also said the young people are very exuberant, sometimes they sing or cheer in response to developments in the Chamber, which previously would not have been allowed. Similarly, the youth are putting pressure on parliament to bring in new technology such as AI. Usually, sittings are in the afternoon, they have requested to sit in the morning so they can do other things in the afternoon. In the past, businessmen would work in the morning then attend parliament in the afternoon.

In response to Ms Umulisa, he said the youngest MP is 22 years old. He said there is a requirement for an MP to be 21 years of age.



7. Communication by Mr Alberto Nkutumula, Assembly of the Republic of Mozambique

Mr Alberto Nkutumula presented the following communication:

Your Excellency Dr. José Pedro MONTERO, President of the Association of Secretaries-General of Parliaments (ASGP);
Honourable Members of the Executive Committee of the ASGP;

Honourable Secretaries-General, my peers;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is with great honour and great satisfaction that I address you in this, my first participation in the work of the ASGP, given my recent appointment to the post of Secretary General of the Assembly of the Republic of Mozambique on 13 February this year.

As soon as I took up my post, I learnt that the Spring Session of our Association was being held in this beautiful city of Tashkent and I was immediately fascinated by the thematic approach that was presented to us, and it was in this context that I proposed to make a presentation entitled ‘Young Mozambican Parliamentarians: Expectations and

Contribution to the Representation of the People’, as part of the broader theme ‘Responding to the Expectations of Young Parliamentarians’.

I would like to take this opportunity to refer firstly to the importance of the political participation of young people, who are the driving force behind the development of any society, with their own dynamics and legitimate aspirations, and whose inclusion in the political process represents one of the great hopes for strengthening democracy and popular representation.

In Mozambique, a country with a rapidly growing population, young people make up the largest section of the population, and United Nations figures show that almost 80 per cent of the country's population is under 35 years of age, which is symptomatic of the role that is reserved for young people in building the future of the Mozambican homeland.

Given that the country is facing enormous development challenges, it is obvious that youth is the layer that suffers the most, not least because of its specific characteristics. I'm referring fundamentally to challenges linked to education, health, employment, housing and the fight against social inequalities, among others, so the involvement of young people in political and socio-economic processes is a real priority.

In the field of political participation, the country has seen a growing involvement of young people, mainly in the context of promoting their rights and defending their interests. For instance, we have seen an exponential increase in the number of young people in social activism, selflessly exercising their civil and political rights, which is healthy for Mozambique's young democracy, even though they still face obstacles of various kinds, such as some reservations on the part of certain sections of the older generations and the difficulty of liaising between different youth groups.

It is worth mentioning that the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique recognises, in article 123, that youth played a decisive role in the struggle for national liberation and democracy, constituting the renewing force of society, as well as establishing that the state promotes, supports and encourages youth initiatives in the consolidation of national unity, reconstruction, development and defence of the country.

Within this framework, and in the context of political participation, we can see the creation of the Parliamentary Youth Office, at the level of the Assembly of the Republic, bringing together all Members of Parliament aged up to 35 at the time of their investiture, which is in line with the definition established in the African Youth Charter, which considers young people to be between the ages of 18 and 35.

With regard to the expectations of young parliamentarians, they generally consist of ensuring, in the legislative field and in monitoring government activity, that the rights of young people are defended and their interests promoted, which involves energetic and properly structured action, with a support base in line with the wishes of the group they represent.

It is from this perspective that the Parliamentary Youth Office aims to guarantee training, capacity building and actions that improve the performance of its members in the Assembly of the Republic and in their constituencies, and it interacts with all public or private organisations, national or foreign, geared towards youth actions.

The duties of the Parliamentary Youth Office are as follows:

- Promoting youth rights;
- Promoting debates to strengthen citizenship and young people's participation in leadership and decision-making;
- Ensuring collaboration and coordination with the various national and international organisations that bring together young people in the political, economic and socio-cultural spheres;
- Establishing cooperation with similar organizations at regional and international level.

In terms of organisation and operation, the Parliamentary Youth Office has a board made up of a President, two Vice-Presidents and two Members, appointed by the President of the Assembly of the Republic, at the proposal of the parliamentary benches, in accordance with the principle of representativeness. Its structure and operation are defined by its own regulations, approved by the Standing Committee of the Assembly of the Republic, on a proposal from the plenary of the Parliamentary Youth Office, as is the case with its Programme of Activities, Budget, Report and Financial Statements.

Dear Colleagues,

Although it represents an excellent platform for amplifying the voice of youth, the Youth Parliamentary Office faces challenges related to the very structure of the political system, in the sense that our young MPs face a series of structural and social challenges that hinder the full exercise of their representative mission.

Among the most notable challenges is the need for greater training for young parliamentarians, not only in terms of technical knowledge, but also in strengthening their capacity for political articulation. Indeed, political training is an essential aspect if these young people are to be able to fulfil their duties effectively.

In addition, we subscribe to the general understanding that the relationship with civil society, non-governmental organisations and youth social movements also needs to be closer, in order to ensure that the demands of young people are well represented and that young parliamentarians can count on the support of these groups when it comes to implementing their initiatives. Moreover, young MPs' expectations of their role in Parliament are high, in the sense that many of them see politics as a way of fighting for a fairer and more equal society.

However, internal disputes within political parties, pressure for alliances with more conservative groups and other limitations imposed by the national political spectrum make these objectives a major challenge, with the result that the majority find themselves torn between the need to maintain their loyalty to the party for which they were elected and the fight for an agenda that actually benefits young people.

With this in mind, the General Secretariat of the Assembly of the Republic of Mozambique, in fulfilment of its duties as the Parliament's technical-administrative support body, has sought to provide training packages for young MPs through its Centre for Parliamentary Studies and Training.

These training packages deal with cross-cutting issues, with the aim of equipping young MPs with the capacity for informed analysis and reasoned positioning on issues related to promoting the interests of young people and defending their rights in the Assembly of the Republic, the privileged stage for political debate on the major issues affecting young people.

The results of these actions have been visible to the public, as a result of the speeches made by young MPs in the plenary session of the Assembly of the Republic, but also in Parliament's specialised committees and as part of the parliamentary days in the constituencies, where MPs interact with youth organisations and bodies working in the area of multidimensional youth empowerment.

As a challenge, within the framework of meeting the expectations of young parliamentarians, the General Secretariat of the Assembly of the Republic of Mozambique has set its sights on expanding partnerships with civil society organisations and other cooperation partners, with the express purpose of continuously and permanently enhancing the capacities of the Parliamentary Youth Office, as a forum for bringing together young people of different political persuasions in parliament, but with a willingness to work together in favour of the aspirations of Mozambican youth, without discrimination of any kind.

Mr President of the ASGP, Secretaries General, my peers, that's all I've set out to say on the important subject of Meeting the Expectations of Young Parliamentarians, sharing the experience of the Assembly of the Republic of Mozambique. Thank you very much for your attention.

Ms Claressa Surtees, Australia, noted Alberto's mention of competing allegiances for young parliamentarians, between the views of the young parliamentarian cohort and party-political priorities. She asked whether the Mozambique parliament has developed any methods for young MPs to co-operate on youth issues?

Mr Alberto Nkutumula, Mozambique, responded that the parliament of Mozambique has approved the norms that regulate the youth parliamentarians, this is approved by the Assembly. He said young people in the Young Parliamentarians' Office are chosen by their parties and then approved in plenary session. Parliamentarians therefore speak on behalf of their party, which greatly limits the independence of the youth parliamentarians.

Mr Kamoru Ogunlana, Nigeria, noted the emphasis has been on the entry points of the young parliamentarians into parliament. In Nigeria, service of MPs is full-time. He asked whether these young parliamentarians are combining this role with continuing schooling. Also, what is the package available to them after their service?

Mr Alberto Nkutumula, Mozambique, replied that MPs are not full-time in Mozambique, they can teach, learn or be lawyers. Some Members of Parliament are working lawyers. All Members can work outside the parliament; it is not considered a full-time activity. Members of Parliament receive an allowance, but since 2024, they no longer receive allowances when their term of office ends. However, members of the Government received money in compensation. He said there is no limit on what MPs can do after leaving the parliament.



8. Communication by Mr Talip Uzun, Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, on 'Grand National Assembly of Türkiye in Focus: Current Developments, News and Innovations'

Mr Talip Uzun presented the following communication:

Distinguished Colleagues,

- Firstly, I would like to thank Uzbekistan for their hospitality. It is a great pleasure for me to be here today on the occasion of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments.
- It is highly valuable for us, as secretaries general, to come together and exchange views on the shared challenges we face.
- Effective and efficient legislative activities are one of our main priorities.
- In order to achieve this goal, we should closely follow the innovative transformations taking place on a global scale and we should adapt to these changes in the best way.
- In this regard, we are witnessing the transformation of artificial intelligence into a reality that permeates every aspect of life.
- Artificial intelligence accelerates decision-making processes, increases efficiency and offers more effective solutions.
- Türkiye continues to introduce new initiatives to gain a strong position in this ongoing transformation.
- Since 2021 (twenty twenty-one), the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy aims to contribute to the welfare of society by setting concrete goals for the effective use of artificial intelligence in public administration.
- Grand National Assembly of Türkiye also attach great importance to artificial intelligence applications and digital technologies to improve the efficiency of legislative processes.
- However, we should not forget that the use of artificial intelligence in parliaments can also bring about certain challenges.
- Data security, privacy protection and transparency of algorithms are among the issues that need to be carefully addressed.
- Ethical issues and fair use principles are of great importance in the integration of artificial intelligence into decision-making processes. The protection of fundamental values such as human rights, equality and justice should always be at the forefront in the use of these technologies.
- In this respect, the Ethics Committee for Public Officials in Türkiye has recently issued the “Code of Ethical Conduct for Public Officials in the Use of Artificial Intelligence Systems.” These principles have also been shared with our parliamentary staff.

- I would also like to mention the Research Committee on Artificial Intelligence established as part of parliament in order to make the best use of the artificial intelligence, to establish a solid legal basis and to minimize the risks.
- This committee is an important step toward using artificial intelligence in a way that puts social benefit first and helps integrate these technologies into legislative processes.
- So far, the commission has brought together leading stakeholders in this field, from non-governmental organizations to public institutions, from academia to the private sector, and held comprehensive meetings on the future of artificial intelligence and its uses.
- The report prepared by the Committee will play a pivotal role in shaping the artificial intelligence ecosystem in Türkiye and guiding developments in this field.

Honorable Colleagues,

I would also like to share the projects on artificial intelligence and digital transformation, some of which are currently being developed in our parliament.

- The Minutes Information System provides automatic transcription of the speeches made in the General Assembly and committees in parliament.
- Thanks to the ‘speech recognition’ and ‘speaker recognition’ features added to the system, the names and constituencies of MPs can be automatically added to the minutes. This project not only increases efficiency in parliaments, but also makes law-making processes more transparent and traceable.
- On the other hand, we are in the finalization phase of the MP Information System, which enables MPs to submit legislative proposals digitally and monitor existing proposals.
- This system, where plenary speeches and press conferences can be monitored, is now also accessible via mobile phones and tablets. Thus, this system allows member of parliaments to follow legislative processes from anywhere at any time.
- In addition, the Laws and Decisions Information System helps us to digitize data on legislative and oversight activities and publish them on the official website in a clear and consistent way.
- As you know, tracking and accessing documents is especially important in the field of archiving. In this regard, we have developed dedicated archive software within the capabilities of our administrative organization. Thanks to this system, it is now much easier to digitally track, manage, and access archived documents.
- The Video and Photo Request System is also in service to ensure that the video and photo recordings of the speeches made in the plenary and committees are delivered to the member of parliaments in a fast and effective manner.

A demand management system has been set up in Parliament to improve the delivery of various services, such as IT support, service vehicles, hairdressing, car washing, and tea and coffee services. Members of Parliament and staff can now submit their requests on a wide range of services through a digital platform.

Dear Colleagues,

- This year marks the 105th anniversary of the opening of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye. The 23rd of April, National Sovereignty and Children's Day, is a special holiday that celebrates the creativity of children and their hopes for the future.
- On this occasion, we have chosen artificial intelligence as the theme for our children's holiday. The theme of artificial intelligence will provide a great opportunity to strengthen children's bond with technology on this special day, encourage them to think innovatively and have a say in the world of the future.
- In this way, future engineers, scientists and artists will be able to experience using technology consciously and creatively at a young age. Within the scope of artificial intelligence-themed activities, workshops, competitions and training programmes will be organized to increase our children's interest in technology.
- In my previous addressing, I have also mentioned Environmentally Friendly Green Parliament Initiative that ensure more sustainable solutions regarding our energy needs. In order to strengthen these initiatives, we are preparing various innovative activities and projects. I would like to mention some of them.
- As I mentioned, we have replaced our vehicle fleet with electric domestic vehicles. To support this transformation and promote environmentally friendly transportation, we have installed electric charging stations on the Parliament campus for use by both our staff and Members of Parliament.
- In this regard, we have planned an important project for our Parliament to produce its own energy. Through the installation of a Solar Energy System, this project will allow us not only to meet our own energy needs, but also to sell any surplus energy.
- The project, which will be carried out by the Ministry of Environment, has a capacity of 472 kW. As part of the project, a canopy will be built for vehicles, energy needs will be met, and no additional cost will be incurred.
- Infrastructure work is ongoing for a large-scale solar power plant with a capacity of 15 MW, which is planned to be built on a site outside Ankara.
- Through the project, we will add a new income item to the budget of our institution every year by selling the excess electrical energy we produce within the framework of the state guarantee. By realizing this project, our Assembly will both use public resources more efficiently and lead the clean energy transformation of our country.
- While systems and infrastructure continue to be developed, we also place great importance on family-friendly practices to support the professional lives of our Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff.
- Regulations and policies that improve social opportunities in our parliament play a central role in the development of such practices.

- In this respect, we organize various social and cultural activities to increase the motivation of its employees and MPs, support professional-family balance and strengthen institutional alignment.
- Through sports competitions such as football, basketball and table tennis organized within the parliament, we aim to encourage the personnel to engage in physical activity and to increase institutional solidarity.
- The Turkish Music Choir, which includes both member of parliaments and parliamentary staff, performs at various events, keeping our traditional music alive and adding an artistic dimension to the working environment.
- The construction of a silent walking path in the parliament campus has also begun so that employees and members of parliament can walk in a peaceful environment in touch with nature.
- In addition, with the slogan “105 Thousand Saplings on the 105th Anniversary – Breath for the Future, Hope for Tomorrow,” we are commemorating the 105th anniversary of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye and the spirit of 23 April by planting 105 thousand saplings. Each tree planted will stand as a symbol of our independence and the hopeful future of our children.
- Turkish Parliament also attaches great importance to practices that support the professional-family balance of its employees. In this regard, the Nursery, Day Care Centre and Kindergarten continues to serve with a long history of nearly 40 years in our parliament. This institution, which currently benefits 334 children, offers additional courses such as foreign languages, chess, robotic coding and gymnastics with a modern education approach.
- Our kindergarten offers an ideal educational environment for our children with its park, playgrounds and amphitheater in addition to the three-storey building built on 7500 m² within the campus.
- In addition, in order to improve the socio-cultural aspects of our children, trainings are organized by expert teachers in areas such as music workshop, art workshop, drama workshop.
- All these services are provided by 92 employees from different professions such as teachers, foster mothers, psychologists and doctors.

Esteemed Colleagues,

- It is a great opportunity for us to share our experiences and find common solutions with you. We will continue the developments in the field of digitalization, artificial intelligence and social policies in parliamentary work and further strengthen our cooperation.
- I hope that our meeting will be fruitful and I present my respects to all of you.

Mr Simon Burton, UK, asked whether the parliamentary choir is funded by the Parliament and whether it would be performing on 23 April?

Dr Silke Albin, Germany, asked about the application he described, was it an in-house project or was development outsourced?

Mr Ingvar Mattson, Sweden, commented that, in his experience, investing in AI is very expensive which means it is very hard to make financial savings. He said that quality and convenience of the service is often improved but Sweden has not saved money through use of AI.

Mr Edgar Sequeira Martins, Timor Leste, asked how the youths from across the country are selected and whether the young people come back next year or is a new group selected each time?

Mr Talip Uzun, Türkiye, said in response to Mr Burton that the choir is financed by Parliament. He said it's activities and projects are planned 1 year in advance. For the tree planting project, he said the Ministry of Forestry provides the trees.

In response to Mr Mattson, he said the financial savings came from health care expenses being processed by AI. All the bills from hospitals used to be checked manually but now there is an online process. If anything is not covered by the budget it is automatically not billed by the system, when AI was included, the savings increased.

In response to Dr Albin, he said that the application was developed internally by a person specially recruited for this purpose, assisted by external developers. According to him, internalizing skills allows for cost savings. He gave the example of the digital archiving system, for which the parliament had received offers from private providers but ultimately decided to develop the system internally at a lower cost. He emphasized the strategic value of having in-house engineers.

In response to Mr Martins, he said the young people are aged 8 to 15 and the selection criteria requires success in different fields. Competitions were held in the provinces for sports, science, music and the winners from each province are selected to come to the Parliament as a reward. He said there is also a specific quota for children with special needs.



9. Announcement regarding the election

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, announced three nominations for the two vacant positions as ordinary member of the Executive Committee:

Mr Mohammed Albuainain (Bahrain)

Mr Xolile George (South Africa)

Mr. Talip Uzun (Turkey)

He indicated that an election would be held during the afternoon session and that each candidate would have three minutes to present their candidacy.

10. Concluding remarks

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, thanked all members for participating and reminded colleagues to return at 14.30.

THE SITTING ENDED AT 12.30 PM

FOURTH SITTING

Tuesday 8 April 2025 (afternoon)

Dr Jose Pedro Montero, President, in the Chair

THE SITTING WAS OPENED AT 4.30PM

1. Introductory remarks

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, welcomed everyone back to the fourth sitting of the ASGP. He then invited the three candidates to briefly introduce themselves to the Association, after which the election would take place.

H.E Mr Mohammed Ebrahim Alsisi Albuainain, Bahrain:

First offered his sincere condolences to the colleagues of Mr Roy Ngulube then described his academic and professional career. After studying in the United Kingdom, he worked as an engineer for 11 years and then joined the local government for 13 years. He was subsequently elected as a Member of Parliament and represented Bahrain at the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). At the end of his political career, he joined the Bahrain Council of Representatives, where he is now Secretary General, giving him dual expertise in both administration and politics.

He said he was a representative of the Bahrain Institute for Political Development. In this capacity, he promotes the work of the Association, particularly in the fields of information technology and artificial intelligence.

He recalled that the IPU had discussed the creation of a training centre for secretaries-general and that Bahrain had been chosen as the host country for this project. He also mentioned that Manama hosted the 146th IPU Assembly in 2023 and that a joint diploma programme was established between the University of Bahrain and the IPU with a view to strengthening the skills of parliamentary staff. Finally, he reaffirmed his commitment to actively contributing to ASGP initiatives, drawing on his expertise in public management and parliamentary technologies.

Mr Talip Uzun, Türkiye:

First, thanked his colleagues and the other candidates. He recalled that he had already applied for the position in the past, without success. He then detailed his professional career. He first worked in public agencies, initially as an

inspector and then as a director. For the past two years, he has been working for the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, which has 600 members and a particularly large parliamentary staff.

He emphasised the diversity of professions represented within the Grand Assembly (catering, medical services, nurseries). He compared the Assembly to a kind of micro-state, in which innovation is necessary to achieve its objectives.

Finally, he explained his candidacy for the ASGP Executive Committee by his desire to contribute actively to the work of the Association, believing that his experience and knowledge of parliamentary functioning could be put to good use.

Mr Xolile George, South Africa:

First, he thanked his colleagues and expressed his condolences to the family and friends of the Secretary General of Zambia. He emphasised that the latter had been the first person to suggest that he stand for election to the Executive Committee.

He recalled that he came from a country with a long history of fighting racism, oppression and various forms of social injustice. In this context, he affirmed that the ASGP played an essential role in promoting cooperation, peace and knowledge sharing between parliamentary institutions. He noted that he had been a member of the Association for three years and had already presented several papers.

He concluded by stating that he wished to put his expertise, acquired through numerous positions in government and international circles, as well as through his academic career, having studied in South Africa, Germany and the United States, at the service of the Association.

Finally, he expressed his desire to contribute to strengthening the values upheld by the IPU by actively engaging in the Association's work.

**** The session was suspended during the vote ****

The count took place in the office of the President with Dr Jose Pedro Montero (President), Dr Remco Nehmelman (Vice-President), Mr Georg Kleemann (Vice-President), Alice Lala (Joint Secretary) and Elektra Garvie-Adams (Joint Secretary) administering the election (ASGP bureau).

2. Election Result

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, announced the election results:

Number of votes cast	59
Abstentions	2
Spoilt ballots	0
Mr Mohammed ALBUAINAIN (Bahrain)	28 votes
Mr Xolile GEORGE (South Africa)	40 votes
Mr Talip UZUN (Turkey)	28 votes

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, announced that Mr Xolile George and Mr Talip Uzun elected to the Executive Committee.

He reminded colleagues of the ASGP rules, set out in the Election Note, which state:

“If there is a tie between the candidates, then the longest serving member of the Association will be declared elected. In the event of equality in length of service, the oldest candidate will be declared elected.”

He recalled that their term of office would take effect for a period of three years from the day after the close of the Tashkent session, on 10 April 2025, in accordance with Article 18(11) of the Association's Rules.



THEME: ACCESSIBILITY OF PARLIAMENT FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

3. Communication by Dr Silke Albin, Deutscher Bundestag

Dr Silke Albin presented the following communication:

In the context of our debate on accessibility, I would like to report on a special situation from the German Bundestag that may be of interest to you: In March last year, a deaf Member joined the German Bundestag for the first time replacing an outgoing Member. She was also re-elected a Member of the new Bundestag. For both the Bundestag Administration and the new Member, her arrival was a situation neither side had any previous experience of. Diversity and inclusion are

central values for the Bundestag, so efforts were made to enable as smooth a start as possible for the Member.

The Member's key concern is receiving interpretation between spoken and sign language in order to be able to attend plenary sittings and committee meetings as well as to perform her other mandate-related duties in Berlin and in her constituency. The lengthy sittings, meetings and appointments mean the presence of two sign language interpreters who take turns is often required.

However, in Germany demand for the predominantly freelance sign language interpreters significantly outstrips supply. This meant there were no interpreters willing to enter into a permanent employment contract with the Member, which is why multiple freelance sign language interpreters are now used.

The additional funds for this are provided by the Bundestag, as was the case in the past for a paraplegic Member who required a personal assistant. In the last election campaign, however, the expenses for interpreting services during campaign appearances by the Member had to be borne by the Member herself, as the election campaign is not part of her mandate-related duties.

Overall, the Bundestag has had positive experiences with the integration of the deaf Member. In her first few months in parliament, she gave her first speech, which attracted a great deal of media attention. In a large parliament like the German Bundestag, Members with physical disabilities provide a good opportunity to ensure that the concerns and interests of people with disabilities receive special attention in the work of the parliament, but also in society.

Reactively:

For telephone calls there is a specialised provider that the Bundestag Administration also uses for its deaf employees. The telephone call is translated from sign language into spoken language and vice versa for both persons taking part in the call. The Member can see the interpreter on her screen, who has contact with the Member over a camera. Like for the sign language interpreters, the costs for this service were invoiced to the Member by the service provider and paid for by the German Bundestag

Mr Jean-Philippe Brochu, Canada, asked for more examples of the challenges faced and obstacles overcome by that Member?

Ms Sarah Davies, UK, noted Silke's comment about the supply and availability of sign language interpretation. She said there are also shortages in the UK, the House of Commons is re-tendering for its contract and has found that costs have increased

dramatically. She said demand is high in the UK as more public bodies seek to offer BSL translation.

Ms Valerie Simpore Soubeiga, Burkina Faso, informed the Association that there is a member in the parliament of Burkino Faso who requires extra support. The parliament provides a civil servant who has the equipment necessary to support this Member to read and write. The Assembly has paid for this accompanying assistant to attend the IPU session in Tashkent.

Mr Eric Tavernier, France, mentioned that the French Senate is debating its voting procedures, which usually take place with a raised hand. However, when it's not clear, people stand-up to indicate. However, the assembly recently removed this procedure as it is not inclusive, there is someone in a wheelchair who cannot stand-up. He said there is a debate on this very topic that evening in the Senate. He asked if any other countries have this issue?

Mr André Rezsöhazi, Belgium, said they also have a deaf senator who has recently become an MEP, she works with 2 sign language interpreters. He remarked that sign language is not an international language, there are two different versions for the national languages in Belgium. There is also a visually impaired member with a dog, the dog trained for its role by attending several parliamentary sessions.

Mr Kamoru Ogunlana, Nigeria, asked whether the deaf member received support outside the context of the parliament?

Dr Silke Albin, Germany, responded that, in her country too, the demand for sign language interpreters far exceeds the available supply. She mentioned that the use of artificial intelligence could be an interesting option, while pointing out that she is not personally responsible for these issues and that, to her knowledge, this solution has not yet been explored. Regarding the voting procedure for people in wheelchairs, she said that the subject had not yet been discussed in Germany, where voting is still done by a show of hands.

On the subject of activities outside Parliament, she explained that when Members of Parliament visit their constituencies, they are accompanied by their interpreters. However, when it comes to their private lives or informal occasions, they make their own arrangements.



4. Communication by Ms Kushani Rohanadeera, Parliament of Sri Lanka

Ms Kushani Rohanadeera presented the following communication:

Honorable President of the ASGP of IPU,
Distinguished Parliamentarians,
Esteemed Delegates,

It is both an honour and a privilege to address this esteemed gathering at the 150th IPU Assembly on an issue of critical importance: the need for accessibility to committees and proceedings in our parliamentary institutions. Today, we reaffirm our shared commitment to building democratic spaces that are truly inclusive spaces where all citizens, regardless of ability, can engage, participate, and contribute to governance.

IPU standards describe democratic parliaments as one that is representative, open and transparent, accessible, accountable and effective. Accessible parliaments involve the public in their work. Nevertheless, around the world, millions of people with disabilities remain excluded from full and meaningful participation in political processes. Barriers to accessibility—whether physical, communicative, or institutional—have limited their ability to engage with legislative bodies, thereby hindering their fundamental democratic rights.

Dear Colleagues, I think we need to see Disability as a situation of human life, and as a part of human diversity - Since people with disability may have difficulty in engaging in daily life due to changes in the state of health, denied access to make their contribution to society and participate in it by environmental barriers and hostile social attitudes.

Persons with Disabilities should have: The same rights, responsibilities, opportunities and choices as other people

When we consider the - Disability Data and Statistics of Sri Lanka.

According to available data 8.7 % of the total population (nearly 1.7 million people) has been identified as persons with disabilities.

74 % are not involved in any economic process and 34 % of those children have not received any primary education.

Total with difficulties shows 43 % of males and 57 % of females. Proportion of females with difficulties for both, vision and mobility are higher than that of males

Country's available data on disability is now outdated hence Budget for 2025 passed in last month in the parliament allocated 100 million Sri Lankan rupees to build up an identification system for persons with disabilities.

As in many nations, our journey towards inclusive society has been one of progress, but also one that requires continued commitment and effort.

When contemplating Legislative measures, the safety and security of persons with disabilities are secured through constitutional provisions.

For instance, the Constitution of Sri Lanka guarantees the rights of all citizens, it is enshrined in our Constitution that all people of Sri Lanka are entitled to the equal protection of the law. Article 12 (1) of the constitution guarantees the right to equality and non-discrimination as a fundamental right. Further, according to article 12(4) of the constitution, the government may allow to take any affirmative action for the benefit of the persons with disabilities.

In terms of the provisions of the Constitution, government had issued a public administration circular no. 3 of 1988 to grant the 3% of vacancies in public services and public companies, for the disabled candidates who had appropriate qualifications.

Further, Social Security Board Act (1996), national health policy (1996), and Ranaviruseva Act (1999) also included the relevant provisions to ensure the wellbeing and security of persons with disabilities.

In 1997, under general educational reforms, the government had taken a decision to provide inclusive education to children with disabilities in the ordinary classrooms. In 1996, protection of the rights of persons with disabilities Act (No 28 of 1996) was formed as a key legislation to address the issues related to the rights of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka. It was amended by Act no 33 of 2003. Further Amendments to the Act is still in discussion.

Disabled persons (Accessibility) Regulation No 1 of 2006 which is a landmark decision to convert all the public places and public buildings accessible for persons with disabilities, was Gazetted and passed in the Parliament in 2007.

Sri Lanka has had a Rights-based National Policy on Disability since 2003. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was ratified in 2016. National Action Plan on Disability was approved in 2014 and National Human Rights Action Plans (2011 – 2015, 2016-2020 and 2017 – 2021) have included disability.

History has shown us that societies progress when inclusivity is at the core of their policies and governance. Sustainable Development Goal no 16, is also to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. To achieve this, it is important to bear in mind that people with disabilities are entitled to effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Such persons must be empowered so that they could provide their fullest contribution towards the development of the country. That will ultimately boost their self confidence and value when we let them feel that they are a part of the driving force of our country.

Further, when persons with disabilities are given equal opportunities to engage in the political process, democracy is strengthened, and governance becomes more reflective of the diverse populations it serves. That is why Parliament has to ensure accessibility to persons with disabilities to the Parliamentary matters.

When we consider the representation in our Parliament: we are proud to have a visually impaired Member of Parliament for the first time in the current legislature, marking a significant step towards greater inclusivity in governance. This milestone sends a powerful message that political participation is for everyone.

He is encouraged to participate in every Parliamentary Committee without hindering by rules and procedures and we are giving all assistance towards his parliamentary duties.

Sri Lanka has made important steps in improving accessibility to disabled within our Parliament. We have taken several initiatives aimed at making parliamentary and Committee proceedings more inclusive.

A comprehensive assessment of parliament's accessibility to persons with disabilities was conducted in the beginning of 2023 with the funding and expertise of National Democratic Institute (NDI).

The Assessment report recommended several improvements areas such as

- physical space,
- digital space and
- Capacity building of Staff and the Members of the Parliament.

As a result of this, we took measures to appoint a special Task Force comprising of Heads of Departments. This was chaired by the Assistant Secretary General of Parliament.

As per the recommendations of the Assessment a training manual was developed focusing on different aspects of disability inclusion in the context of parliament and the Secretariat. This manual will be used for capacity strengthening in future.

In September 2023, Women Parliamentarians' Caucus of the Parliament also organized a series of sensitization and information sharing sessions on Disability Rights and Inclusion for Members of Parliament. This series of sensitization session is a long-term process of strengthening the capacity of Parliament on disability inclusion.

- **Physical accessibility improvements:** Our Parliament is designed with elevators. We continue to assess and modify our infrastructure to meet evolving accessibility standards with special emphasis to include ramps at the main entrances and committee rooms. Committee rooms of the parliament are located in the first floor of the 4 storied complex for easy accessibility.

Moreover, the seating facility for our new Member is also arranged in the Parliament Chamber enabling his easy access.

Fully developed public sanitation system was opened at the premises in April 2024 to facilitate the persons with disability visiting the Parliament. This has been implemented as a pilot project to expand sanitary facilities especially for the convenience of persons with disabilities.

- **Sign language interpretations:**
Sri Lanka Parliament began sign language commentary with the live telecast of the Parliamentary sessions since November 2021. Budget speech of 2022 was interpreted into sign language for the first time, and this was the first time in South Asia also. As many important parliamentary debates and discussions on national fund allocations occur all the time, these efforts were highly appreciated by the hearing-impaired people of the country.

We are also working towards embedding sign language interpretation in all public parliamentary broadcasts. We are in the process of recruiting a sign language interpreters on permanent basis to the Parliament.

- **Digital accessibility:** Parliamentary documents and records are being made available in digital formats compatible with screen-reader technologies. Parliament Library was transitioned to a digital format, making a variety of informational resources easily accessible to members with Mobility challenges.

- **Documentation:**
We are in the process of preparing braille versions of our Constitution, Standing Orders (rules and procedures) and Powers and Privileges Act of the Parliament.

- **Remote Participation:** Committee room with broadcasting camera system:

In 2019 we installed broadcasting quality camera system in one of our Committee rooms. Committee on Public Enterprises - Financial Committee which examine the accounts of Public Corporations and any business undertakings vested in the Government have its sessions in this Committee room.

These Committee hearings and parliamentary consultations are increasingly being facilitated through virtual platforms that accommodate accessibility features. This has particularly benefited individuals who face mobility challenges.

- **Parliamentary Caucus for Persons with Disabilities of the current legislature:** The Caucus of new parliament was inaugurated on 12th March 2025, on the request of Disability Organizations Joint Front (DOJF), which consists of 30-Member organizations spread across the country including North and East. These organizations represent all categories of disabilities namely, physical, hearing, visual and intellectual disabilities. The Caucus appointed their chair as first visually impaired Member in this legislature, Hon. Sugath Wasantha de Silva M.P., Caucus for Persons with Disabilities was introduced by the former legislature and it was also worked closely with the DOJF. Present Caucus will continue the initiatives taken by the former forum.

These steps reflect our commitment to inclusivity, but they also highlight the need for continuous improvement and innovation. Accessibility should not be treated as a one-time initiative but as an ongoing process.

Sri Lanka's Progress in Accessibility is a long journey... However, challenges remain.

Challenges and Areas for Further Improvement

Despite our progress, several challenges remain with reference to ensuring complete accessibility to parliamentary committees and proceedings:

- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Many public buildings, including historical parliamentary structures, which still require significant modifications to be fully accessible. Renovations must be approached with a balance of preserving heritage and embracing modern accessibility standards.
- **Limited Awareness and Training:** Ensuring that parliamentary staff and legislators are trained in disability inclusion and accessibility adaptation of best practices is crucial. Training programs must be embedded in parliamentary operations to sensitize decision-makers on the needs of persons with disabilities.
- **Technology and Funding Constraints:** The introduction of assistive technologies requires investment, and sustained funding is necessary to maintain and improve accessibility measures. Stronger budgetary allocations must be made toward inclusive digital and physical infrastructures.

- **Legislative Representation:** There remains a need to actively encourage and support persons with disabilities to participate in the legislative procedure as elected representatives in Parliament. Governments and political parties must introduce initiatives to empower individuals with disabilities to contest elections and contribute meaningfully to policy-making.

The Global Responsibility for Inclusive Democracy

Honourable colleagues, accessibility in Parliament is not just a national concern; it is a global imperative. As members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, we bear the responsibility of ensuring that democratic institutions worldwide reflect the diversity and needs of all citizens.

Several nations have pioneered remarkable accessibility initiatives, such as fully digitized legislative processes for visually impaired citizens, AI-powered sign language interpretation, and designated parliamentary advisory bodies comprising persons with disabilities. Sharing these best practices will accelerate progress globally.

I call upon this Assembly to commit to stronger international collaboration in sharing best practices, technological advancements, and policy frameworks that enhance parliamentary accessibility. Through partnership and shared commitment, we can set new global standards that uphold the principles of inclusion, dignity, and equality.

Our parliamentary institutions must move beyond mere compliance with accessibility policies and proactively design mechanisms that encourage and enable participation. This is not just about accommodation; it is about empowerment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us remember that a truly democratic Parliament is one that welcomes all voices. The full participation of persons with disabilities in committees and parliamentary proceedings is not a privilege—it is a fundamental right. Sri Lanka stands resolute in advancing this cause and in working with our international partners to build more inclusive and accessible legislatures.

Let us move forward together - ensuring that no citizen is left behind, in our democratic journey. The progress we make today will shape the governance of tomorrow, and we have a collective duty to ensure that democracy serves every individual, regardless of ability.

I urge all present here to return to their respective countries and ask a simple yet powerful question: Are we truly accessible to all? If the answer is anything less than

a resounding “yes,” then we still have work to do. Let us pledge today to transform our parliaments into spaces of true inclusion, equity, and participation.

Thank you.

Mr Saïd Mokadem, Maghreb Consultative Council, complimented Ms Kushani’s statement that people with disabilities are a normal and natural part of life and should be supported to contribute. He asked how the Constitution of Sri Lanka, and its supporting texts, which seem to have brought in positive discrimination for this section of society, was reconciled with past laws?

Mr Xolile George, South Africa, said that in South Africa there are specific programmes to support disabled Members and also employees. Sign language is the official 12th language of South Africa, it was formally recognised by the constitution recently. However, even before this was formally made law, there was always sign-language interpretation for the plenary meetings. He then apologised in advance for departing, stating that the South Africa delegation were leaving early to attend a memorial service for Mr Roy Ngulube.

Ms Kushani Rohanadeera, Sri Lanka, said it is enshrined in the constitution that everyone is entitled to equal protection under the law, non-discrimination is a fundamental right. In response to South Africa, she said that technology represents a great opportunity to overcome the disadvantages faced by our disabled colleagues.



5. Communication by Ms Chloe Mawson, UK House of Lords

Ms Chloe Mawson presented the following communication:

A case study of the UK House of Lords

Background to the House of Lords and the Palace of Westminster

Membership

1. The House of Lords is the upper chamber of the UK Parliament. For most members appointment is for life and therefore the average age of House of Lords members is higher than many legislatures. The current average age of the House is 70 and the oldest member of the House is 99. Considerable thought has been put into how to support members with disabilities.

Building

2. One of the challenges to making the UK parliament fully accessible is the building. The Palace of Westminster is a UNESCO World Heritage Site built over 150 years ago. The structure is protected and any restorations must ensure to maintain the original architecture and authenticity of the building. Parliament has recognised that the building needs to be more accessible and work is constantly ongoing to make this happen, especially for individuals with disabilities. The Restoration and Renewal Programme is a plan to focus on the essential restoration and refurbishment of the Palace of Westminster to ensure that it is safe for all who work and visit. Restoration and Renewal will focus on modernisation of the Palace to upgrade the Palace to help with accessibility improvements and technological enhancements.

Supporting members with disabilities

3. The House does not collect statistics on how many of its members are registered disabled. However, amongst the current membership there are fulltime wheelchair users, members with severe visual impairments, members with severe hearing impairments and members with complex needs including breathing support.

Hearing and visual impairments

4. In 2023, Members raised that they felt there needed to be further support for those with hearing and visual impairments. An action group was convened to identify, investigate and help resolve these issues. One issue the group identified was the lack of information we hold about the nature and scale of the impairments members suffer from. A survey was sent to all members to gather more information about the number who suffer from hearing and visual impairments and to what degree. Out of those who chose to respond, 36 members (67%) confirmed they are hearing impaired with their most common adjustment being the use of hearing aids. A total of 9 respondents (17%) confirmed they are visually impaired with their most common adjustment being the use of visual aids and assistive technologies. The work that followed included, a technical review of the House of Lords Chamber sound quality and sound quality in committee rooms. Staff received specialist training on operating hearing loops in committee rooms. The Broadcasting Unit have ensured the hearing loops are audited frequently. Our audio experts have been holding personal consultation with individual members to assess their needs and support fine tuning of their hearing aids.

5. Work is ongoing to make business documents produced by the House of Lords administration more accessible. Many key procedural documents are now available in a larger text version. The Library have also started producing their Library briefings with larger text.

Workplace adjustments

6. Improvements to work areas are being made to help those with disabilities. A focus on providing workplace adjustments was established in 2018 as part of the House's continuing commitment to ensure an inclusive workplace. The two Houses of the UK parliament share an occupational health department which can provide assessment of suitable adjustments to help members and staff.
7. The aim of workplace adjustments is to provide disability confidence, competence, and improved accessibility to work by providing specialist information and advice regarding workplace support. Adjustments can include assistive technologies such as a larger computer screen, keyboard, or speech recognition software. Other adjustments can include changes to work-stations such as a height adjustable desk, ergonomic mouse, or chair. Offices adjustments can also be put in place to ensure wheelchair accessibility and are located in close proximity to an accessible toilet. Doors that require pass-reader access have lowered the pass readers to make it easier for those in wheelchairs.
8. The Chamber of the House of Lords has three places for members with wheelchairs to sit and speak. These places have specially lowered microphones and are at the centre of the Chamber where they can be seen and can easily see other members.

Adaptations to proceedings

9. Members who are unable physically to attend the House on grounds of long-term disability can apply for permission to participating in proceedings remotely: this includes remote speaking and voting. Remote participation was introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the continuity of parliamentary business while adhering to social distancing measures and while the right to participate in House proceedings is longer available to most members it was retained as a way to assist disabled members. The process is governed by Standing Order.

10. Two members have asked for special permission to have others read their words in parliamentary proceedings because the specialist breathing equipment they depend on makes it hard for them to speak for long periods. In July 2012, the Procedure and Privileges Committee agreed that one member would be allowed to call upon an assistant both to provide practical and personal help in the Chamber or Grand Committee, for instance in managing papers or taking notes, and, on occasions when she is unable to complete a speech, to read out the text of that speech on her behalf⁵. In 2022 this was extended to a second member. The decision overturned a standing order dating back to 1707, which states that “no person shall be on the floor of the House” except peers and House of Lords staff. The first member to be granted this help described the decision as “uplifting” and said it would make her “feel equal” on the floor of the House.⁶ This particular member was nominated by the House of Lords Appointments Commission in 2007 on the basis of her work in the field of equal rights for those with disabilities, including as a Commissioner of the Disability Rights Commission.

Extra funding to support those with disabilities

11. Membership of the House of Lords is neither employment nor an office. Therefore, most members of the House of Lords do not receive a salary for their Parliamentary duties. Members are eligible to receive a daily allowance and, within certain limit, travel expenses for days when they attend the House for Parliamentary duties.

12. Members with a disability may recover additional expenses to help support them in their parliamentary duties. Members seeking additional allowances will submit a request to a body called the Additional Support Group and each case is considered on its own merits. All information supplied to the group about individual cases is redacted or otherwise presented in an anonymously to ensure, if possible, that the identity of the member or member(s) seeking additional support remains confidential.

Digital assistance

13. The UK Parliament’s Digital Service Accessibility Team have collected some resources on accessibility features to help members and staff make the most of your digital tools. The accessibility features are designed to help

⁵ [Committee Report 4.3](#)

⁶ [Disabled peer set to make history in Lords after ‘uplifting’ decision - Level Playing Field](#)

people with disabilities to use technology more easily. For example, a text to speech feature reads text out loud for people with limited vision. A speech recognition feature allows individuals with limited mobility to control a device with their voice.

Workplace Equality Networks

14. The UK Parliament has 6 Workplace Equality Networks (WENs), which provide a valuable perspective on inclusion and diversity topics. ParliAble is Parliament's disability network, promoting inclusion and accessibility across Parliament. ParliAble's aim is to provide a supportive networking community for people who have a disability, health condition or are interested in helping those who do. They organize and run a range of campaigns in order to help raise awareness and produce a programme of accessible events throughout the year including events for disability history month and national inclusion week. As part of Deaf awareness week, ParliAble organised a BSL session, teaching basic sign language to gain knowledge, skills and confidence to have a basic conversation with a deaf BSL user both in and outside of work.

15. ParliAble created the Learning Difficulties Group sub-group. The aim of the group is to improve the workplace environment for members of the parliamentary community with learning difficulties. The sub-group have created a dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia line manager tool kit and a guide on ADHD adjustments in the Workplace, to support colleagues and their line-managers.

Making parliament more accessible for non-members

16. Parliament is striving to make the Estate more accessible for visitors. For visitors with mobility or dexterity impairments, Parliament ensures step-free access and entrances are available. Wide corridors and fully accessible lifts are along the line of route and handrails are on all staircases. Wheelchairs are available for visitors to use and flexible seating arrangements are located across Parliament to position wheelchairs. For visitors who are neurodivergent or have cognitive impairment, quiet spaces are available on request and ear-defenders can be provided. Parliament is constantly working to improve the accessibility on the estate for visitors. In 2025, the House of Commons Modernisation Committee will explore how the physical Parliamentary estate could be made more accessible to those with

disabilities, and whether changes to language could make it easier to understand how Parliament works.⁷

17. To increase the accessibility of broadcasting, live subtitling is now available for all proceedings in the Chambers of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Lord McFall of Alcuith, the Lord Speaker said *“The Lords have always strived to give the public greater insight into their work. “ The latest upgrade towards greater accessibility is welcome progress, and I’m sure every peer will be happy to see this step forward. Strengthening the links between Parliament and UK society is something they regard as crucial.”*⁸

18. The Autism Act 2009 Committee is a House of Lords special inquiry committee examining the 2009 Act and to also make recommendation on what the Government should do next. The first session in March focused on key issues in the identification, diagnosis and support of those with autism. Careful consideration was given by the Committee Office to make proceedings on this committee accessible. Bespoke guidance for witnesses and members of the public attending our meetings was created which provided crafted advice to the Chair and members about how to create a welcoming environment. For example, asking questions in the form it has been shared with witnesses, and easy read versions of our call for evidence and guidance documents were created.

Mr Ahcene Djouhara, Algeria, asked whether there are partnerships between the House of Lords and special associations who advocate for persons with disabilities, to inform the accessibility policies?

Mr Jean-Philippe Brochu, Canada, asked whether there are special provisions to support accessible participation in committees?

Ms Claressa Surtees, Australia, asked to what extent individual members with disabilities expect to be consulted about the measures for their own support. If they are consulted, does this mean the accessibility measures change in response to changing demand from members?

Ms Chloe Mawson, UK, responded to Algeria that yes, to some extent, the House of Lords does work with outside organisations when developing its policies for

⁷ [Modernisation Committee launches inquiry to make Parliament more accessible and easier to understand - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

⁸ [UK Parliament unveils broadcast accessibility improvements - including live subtitling and expansion of BSL provision - UK Parliament](#)

disabled members. She said they consulted the Royal National Institute for the Blind about the document layout for visually accessible papers. For particular projects, the Lords does take expert advice from charities and organisations. However, these organisations are not part of the decision-making process.

In response to Canada, she said that committees can meet in hybrid format so Members and witnesses can participate remotely. Most interestingly, she said committees who have looked at issues relating to disabilities have done the most innovative work on improving accessibility. For example, a committee looking into support for people with autism has recently discussed improving how questions are asked to make it accessible for autistic people, reducing overwhelming features of a meeting room and having pre-meetings to help autistic people enjoy a process which is more predictable.

In response to Australia, she said the House of Lords does work closely with the Members concerned when designing accessibility measures. For example, when they made provision for the first member with breathing problems, it was the Member's wish to have an assistant speak for her. This was not a suggestion from the House. She remarked that the Member really appreciated having her preference respected. On the other hand, she said that occasionally they have consulted Members about the plans they have to increase accessibility but, despite receiving support during the planning phase, the Members have later opposed the changes proposed. In conclusion, she said the House of Lords does have different accessibility measures for different people depending on their preference.



6. Communication by Mr Jean-Philippe Brochu, House of Commons in Canada

Mr Jean-Philippe Brochu presented the following communication:

Accessibility at the House of Commons

I am pleased to address you today to discuss the accessibility initiatives that the House of Commons of Canada has implemented or is actively working on. To begin, I'd like to provide some context.

Accessible Canada Act

Canada has passed the Accessible Canada Act, in June of 2019. The Act came into force on July 11, 2019. It recognizes the existing human rights framework that supports equality for people with disabilities in Canada. This includes:

- the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- the Canadian Human Rights Act, and
- Canada’s commitments as a State Party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Accessible Canada Act builds on this framework with the goal of creating a barrier-free Canada by 2040, with a specific focus on improving the lives of persons with disabilities by identifying, removing, and preventing obstacles along the way. It is about creating communities, workplaces and services that enable everyone to participate fully in society without barriers.

The Act applies to the federally regulated private sector, which includes the banking, transportation and telecommunications sectors, as well as the Government of Canada, Crown corporations and Parliament.

Under the Act, Canada’s Parliament is required to develop and publish accessibility plans that describe how we identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility. We are required to establish a mechanism for receiving and addressing feedback on accessibility from anyone who interacts with our organization. Finally, we have to develop regular progress reports on the implementation of their plan and addressing any feedback they receive.

As such, the House is committed to fulfilling all of its responsibilities under the Accessible Canada Act, including adhering to its regulations and standards, and to being a leader in advancing accessibility.

House of Commons Accessibility Plan 2023-2025

In December 2022, the Board of Internal Economy, the administrative governing body of the House, adopted and published its first Accessibility Action Plan for 2023-2025.

To develop this plan, the organization consulted with individuals with a wide range of disabilities to better understand the challenges they face when interacting with the House.

In response to these challenges, the House is actively working on implementing targeted initiatives aimed at removing and preventing barriers to accessibility. To date, more than 40 initiatives have been completed.

Accessibility Secretariat – Responsibilities

To ensure that accessibility remains a priority in the House's activities, the institution has established the Accessibility Secretariat, responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of strategies and policies, including:

- Coordinating the implementation and updates of the Accessibility Plan;
- Providing leadership, guidance, and coordination across the House;
- Ensuring continuous consultations with persons with disabilities; and
- Monitoring feedback and evaluating responses.

Administratively, the Secretariat first reported to the Clerk of the House, highlighting the importance of this file and the need for the development of a cross-service vision. It has recently been moved within Human Services.

Accessible Workforce Practices

Through accessible workforce practices, the House aims to ensure that all Members, their staff, and Administration employees, including those with disabilities, have equal chances to thrive and contribute to the organization's success.

Training on general accessibility awareness and best practices for providing accessible customer service are available to all, as well as specialized training for managers and supervisors in fostering a disability-inclusive workplace. The general training was made mandatory for our more than 2000 House administration employees. We have achieved a compliance rate above 90% within the first three months, which is exceptional.

The House helps Members by providing templates, guides, and tools to assess their recruitment, retention, accommodation processes, and both physical and digital environments for accessibility.

As 2025 is an election year, the House will ensure newly elected members are accompanied from day 1 after their election as part of their onboarding program.

To further support Administration employees, an employee resource group was created in 2024 to bring together people with visible and non-visible disabilities, along with their allies. It helps raising awareness and serves as a community where employees can share their experience.

The group aims to improve accessibility and inclusion by discussing topics like sharing successful strategies, managing change, and addressing hidden disabilities.

Accessible Web Content

In terms of website accessibility, the House is dedicated to making sure its public website complies with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 and is actively working to reach compliance. WCAG 2.1 defines how to make Web content more accessible to people with disabilities, including visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, language, learning, and neurological disabilities. They apply to desktops, laptops, tablets, and mobile devices.

Regular independent external audits, as well as continued internal testing and remediation efforts are conducted.

By early 2025, the most visited sections of the House's public website, ourcommons.ca, have reached an average of 85% compliance with WCAG 2.1 AA standards.

The House continues to invest in training and tools for its development teams, while hiring employees with lived experience and specialized expertise to support this effort. One of the objectives is to consider accessibility as part of the development phase of our websites and systems.

Assistive Technology

Assistive technologies are being used and tested within the institution to support both staff and the public, ensuring everyone can access its spaces and services more effectively and inclusively.

One of the pilot projects currently in development is GoodMaps, a navigation and mapping technology designed to improve accessibility for people with disabilities. GoodMaps provides accessible navigation, audio direction and interaction in complex spaces for all users. Once spaces are mapped, users can be guided to their destination or notified of key points along the way. Unlike most GPS-based apps, GoodMaps provides precise accuracy down to the meter.

The Communication Access Realtime Translation, or CART, is another assistive technology currently being used. It improves communication and inclusivity for people with hearing impairments in real-time situations. CART converts, in less than 5 sec, spoken language into written text in either English or French. The technology is available at eight different locations throughout the Galleries in the House Chamber, including two locations specifically designated for wheelchair users.

Accessibility and the Rehabilitation of the Center Block Building

The House of Commons is dedicated to creating an accessible and secure built environment for Members, employees and visitors, ensuring that all its facilities

meet or exceed standards and integrate universal accessibility into the modernization of its infrastructure.

The Centre Block rehabilitation represents one of the largest and most complex heritage restoration projects ever undertaken in Canada. Home to the Senate, House of Commons, and Library of Parliament, it has been closed for renovations since 2018 and is set to reopen in 2031, with both Chambers temporarily relocated.

Universal Accessibility in the Rehabilitated Center Block Building

The House has already started to leverage the numerous opportunities to remove accessibility barriers during its ongoing rehabilitation project of the Centre Block building.

The project is seeking an accreditation from the Rick Hansen Foundation. This comprehensive rating system evaluates the accessibility of buildings and sites through the adoption of Universal Design principles. It is Canada's most recognized rating system that identifies and certifies the accessibility of the built environment with consistent methodology.

The Peace Tower ceremonial entrance of the Centre Block building is currently not accessible to persons with mobility disabilities. Modifications are needed to make it inclusive and accessible for all.

Several solutions were proposed; however, the preferred barrier-free option requires minimal interventions to the existing entrance and surrounding heritage elements.

The chosen solution involves installing a collapsible stair at the center of the stairway.

Example from Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris (Type E stepless stair)

The collapsible stair is designed for both indoor and outdoor use and is virtually invisible when not in use. The manufacturer custom builds the stair to suit each site, using the same finishes as the surrounding steps. When the stair lift is in use, the steps slowly lower until they form a platform, allowing the user to get on or off. This mechanism has been successfully installed at the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris and at the Danish Parliament Building.

Universally accessible washrooms

The Centre Block rehabilitation project is reimagining the typical washrooms we often encounter. Instead, the House is adopting individual washrooms, to better accommodate persons with a broad range of disabilities.

- All water closet compartments will include both a toilet and a sink.
- Larger washroom blocks will have two entry and exit points to the washroom area.
- Different washroom configurations will better accommodate persons with a broad range of disabilities.

Parliamentary Office Units

Guiding principles for redesigning the parliamentary office units in Centre Block have been established, focusing on providing accessible routes and the flexibility to adjust the layout to ensure accessibility for Members, staff, and their guests. Parliamentary Office Units will be equipped with automatic door operators at the suite entry doors, and some key suites will also have operators inside. Additionally, the furniture in the suites can be arranged to accommodate any requirement.

Speaker's Chair

The Centre Block Rehabilitation team was given the mandate to make the House Speaker's chair accessible, as the House strives to ensure that a dignified strategy is in place to accommodate the various needs of current and future Speakers. A study is currently being conducted to assess the accessibility requirements for the chair and dais. Design options will be proposed once all requirements are clearly defined and feasible solutions are identified, ensuring the heritage value of the chair is preserved. Although still in the early design phase, plans include an extensive overhaul of the Speaker's chair and dais, to incorporate audio-visual features, ventilation upgrades, and adjustments to ensure persons with mobility disabilities can access the dais. House Chamber. Other aspects are considered to make the Chamber even more accessible, such as the addition of accessible ramps.

Conclusion

As you have seen, the House has taken a multi-faceted approach, with expected improvements to its built environment, as well as its technical systems and websites. This required a strong commitment and leadership, training and tools, which were offered by a dedicated team providing expert advice to the House Administration, as well as parliamentarians

Mr Eric Tavernier, France, pointed out that the Palais du Luxembourg, seat of the French Senate, is an old building dating back to 1715, which poses significant architectural constraints. He gave the example of the installation of a retractable staircase to improve accessibility to the building. He then asked whether remote

voting was possible in the Canadian Parliament and pointed out that France had decided against it for security reasons.

He then asked whether there were quotas for the recruitment of persons with disabilities. He indicated that in France, 6% of positions are reserved for them, and that the French Senate pays a fine to a specialised agency when it fails to meet this quota. He wondered whether similar provisions existed in Canada.

Mr André Rezsöházy, Belgium, said they also have a quota, they are required to hire 3% of staff who are disabled. He reiterated the question of whether Canada has a quota?

Mr Simon Burton, UK, asked whether the Good Maps App was available to all Members and staff, and whether there were any security concerns when developing the app?

Mr Edgar Sequeira Martins, Timor Leste, pointed out that his country was only just beginning to address the issue of accessibility. He asked whether there were any measures in place to promote cognitive accessibility and, if so, how satisfied the beneficiaries were with them. He then asked whether the changes implemented in Canada were the result of an institutional initiative or whether they had been implemented at the request of the persons concerned.

Mr Kamoru Ogunlana, Nigeria, also praised Canadian practices, describing them as a model to follow, and asked about the total cost of the development plan mentioned in the presentation.

Dr Jose Pedro Montero, President, said that in Uruguay there is a rule to ensure 10 percent of staff are disabled, recently a woman joined the administrative office who is blind, this was easier to accommodate in the administrative office, that when she was promoted to the committee office. Now they are looking to change things to ensure that she can work in the committee office.

Mr Jean-Philippe Brochu, Canada, said remote voting is possible in the House of Commons, all MPs can use the system, not just MPs with disabilities. There are special measures for an MP who is tetraplegic and cannot raise a hand, he notifies clerks in advance of his vote. With regards to staff, there is no quota for the parliament but candidates who apply for a job can self-declare a disability. If two candidates are tied, the one with the disability will be appointed.

In response to the UK, he said security of the map was a key issue. He said 6 or 7 years ago, Google came into the premises with street view to map the route, so pictures of the entire parliamentary estate are already available online.

In response to Timor Leste, he said the approach is very personalised for every MP. There is a team that seeks to meet the needs of every MP. An accessibility secretariat attempts to meet the needs of all staff. He said technology has provided lots of new solutions which help the Parliaments to meet the needs of staff and Members.

In response to the question on the Accessibility Act, he said there is significant lobbying in Canada to ensure all workplaces are accessible and to meet the needs of disabled people. This was something that resonates with the Government and they were very open to these proposals. He said most costs were paid for internally out of existing budgets, except the Accessibility Secretariat. When they bring in new systems, it is easier to ensure they are accessible.



7. Concluding remarks

Mr Kyrre GRIMSTAD, Norway, asked to speak briefly about an event in Norway. He said that Norway is hosting the intergovernmental forum, an international forum which brings together government, parliament, private sectors. It is convened by the Secretary General of the UN from 23-27 June outside Oslo. There will be several thousand delegates in person and more online. There is a parliamentary track, organised in conjunction with the UN and IPU, it will take place on 23 and 24 June and focus on freedom of expression and the danger of misinformation and online harms. There will be a visit to parliament and a reception for parliamentary colleagues. He concluded by saying that Secretaries General and their MPs are warmly welcome to attend the meeting in June.

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, closed the sitting and reminded members that the session would recommence at 10am tomorrow. He closed the sitting.

THE SITTING ENDED AT 17.20

FIFTH SITTING

Wednesday 9 April 2025 (morning)

Dr Jose Pedro Montero, President, in the Chair

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THE SITTING WAS OPENED AT 10.10AM

1. Introductory remarks

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, welcomed everyone back and summarised the programme for the day ahead.

2. New members

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, told the Association that the secretariat had received a request for membership from Ms Virginia Ortiz, Secretary General of the House of Representatives of Uruguay. The Executive Committee agreed to propose her for membership.

The Association approved the proposal.

3. Update on the work of the Centre for Innovation in Parliament, Andy Richardson

Mr Andy Richardson presented the work of the innovation centre in relation to artificial intelligence.

Ms Jeanette Emberson, Fiji, described the artificial intelligence hub that has just been launched in the Pacific region with the aim of strengthening transparency and good governance.

3. Presentation on the 'Welcoming new Members of Parliament' project, Laurence Marzal

Ms Laurence Marzal, IPU, presented progress on ASGP-IPU project on the theme: 'Welcoming new Parliamentarians'. The draft report and toolkit, drawing on survey responses from Association members about their processes, was made available on the ASGP website for review by colleagues.

<https://asgp.co/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/ENGLISH-WELCOMING-NEW-PARLIAMENTARIANS-final-text-0425.pdf>

Mr Simon Burton, UK, remarked that, despite a great deal of support at the start of the parliament, MPs still require ongoing support and learning throughout their career at parliament. He enquired whether this is covered in the toolkit?

Ms Laurence Marzal, IPU, said this is covered partially in the document. The report sets out how to begin and then references the need for continuous learning and ‘parliamentary training institutes.’

Mr Saïd Mokadem, Maghreb Consultative Council, asked about the psychological aspects of Members leaving Parliament. Do they work with psychologists or other specialists?

Ms Laurence Marzal, IPU, said the both the questionnaire and the toolkit are focussed on welcoming new members of parliament. The exit of parliamentarians is out of scope.

Mr Jean-Philippe Brochu, Canada, explained that Canada has an established orientation programme for new parliamentarians, as well as a support programme for members leaving Parliament. He emphasised that Canada's experience had also demonstrated the need for a similar programme for parliamentary staff, noting that staff turnover was higher than that of parliamentarians themselves. Canada has therefore developed a programme specifically for parliamentary assistants. He suggested that this aspect be taken into account in the draft.

Ms Laurence Marzal, IPU, confirmed that the publication also addressed the issue of staff support, a subject close to her heart as she herself had been a parliamentary assistant. However, she pointed out that the publication was fairly brief, as it was intended to be a practical document, a toolkit, for use by parliaments.

THEME: IN THE NEWS AND INNOVATIONS AT PARLIAMENT

4. Communication by Mr Xolile George, Parliament of South Africa, on ‘Ensuring meaningful public participation in the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa’

Mr Xolile George presented the following communication:

INTRODUCTION

South Africa held its first democratic elections in April 1994, just over thirty years ago. Since then, there have been seven general elections, the last in 2024. Over the course of thirty years, South Africa has witnessed profound changes, from a nation characterized by racial segregation and economic exclusion during Apartheid, to a constitutional order where all citizens have been able to exercise their political and economic rights in a just and equitable basis and in the context of a representative and participatory democracy.”

Through democratic and accountable government, South Africa has made considerable progress. The total number of people in employment has risen from approximately eight million in 1994, to over 16.7 million in 2024. The matric pass rate, a key indicator of education quality, has improved significantly, rising from 53.4 per cent in 1995 to 82.9 per cent in 2023. Access to basic municipal services such as water and electricity have also expanded significantly. Notwithstanding such advancements, population growth and rapid urbanization, revolutions in technology and industry as well as budget and public sector constraints have in many ways exacerbated the structural inequalities entrenched during the Apartheid years. Unemployment and poverty remain acute as do the skewed access to resources. These trends, and the unhappiness which they arouse, have placed renewed emphasis on the need for proactive and responsive political institutions.

This paper discusses the Constitutional and legal demands on the national legislature to facilitate public involvement, as well as the efforts taken over time to achieve meaningful participation.

A PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

A paper on democratic participation in South Africa must begin with the fact that the Constitution itself, drafted between 1994-1996, was a product of far-reaching consultations, both with political and social actors and with the public directly. Tens of thousands of people were able to contribute, whether by attending arranged workshops or making written submissions. This set the standard for the new dispensation. The authors of the Constitution understood that, in the context of South Africa’s history and the evolution of modern society, it was not enough for the citizens to vote for their representatives every five years – Parliament had to be an accessible and participatory institution, one in which people could approach and influence their leaders. This would ensure that ordinary people could pursue their interests on an ongoing basis and enable public representatives to make informed decisions.

The Constitution, in fact, expressly enjoined Parliament to facilitate public involvement in its legislative and other affairs . What is more, the Constitution prescribed that Parliament must conduct its business in an open and transparent manner and may not exclude the public, including the media, from proceedings .

The national Parliament is comprised of the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), each with specific constitutional functions and responsibilities. The Assembly is elected through a proportional representation electoral system from a national voter's role. It has 400 members, with eighteen political parties currently represented. The task of the Assembly, as a collective, is to "...ensure government by the people under the Constitution. It does this by choosing the President, by providing a national forum for public consideration of issues, by passing legislation and by scrutinising and overseeing executive action." The NCOP has 90 Members, ten delegates from each provincial legislature Parliament, and is mandated to "... represent the provinces to ensure that provincial interests are taken into account in the national sphere of government..."

Parliament has approached its obligation to facilitate public involvement in different ways. It adopted a statutory and procedural framework to provide formal means for the public to access and influence law-making and other activities within the legislature. These have included rules to support public petitions and to compel committees to consult the public at various stages of the law-making process. Furthermore, Parliament has arranged special campaigns and events to involve particular interest groups. Public and media access has also expanded. Furthermore, while the National Assembly is elected by proportional representation, it has allocated funds and time in the parliamentary calendar for members to undertake work in communities. All these measures signified that the legislature was no longer to be an exclusionary institution but instead a "People's Parliament." Despite these measures, however, numerous studies, as well as various adverse court findings, highlighted ongoing shortcomings in public participation.

In *Doctors for Life International v Speaker of the National Assembly and Others* (2006), the Constitutional Court found that Parliament and the provincial legislatures were constitutionally obliged to take reasonable steps to enable effective public participation in respect of every law passed. The court then invalidated the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Amendment Act (2004) and the Traditional Health Practitioners Act (2004) on the basis of insufficient public participation. At the time Justice Ngcobo wrote that the court's task was to determine whether the legislature had taken reasonable steps, in the circumstances, to facilitate effective public participation, with reference to such factors as parliamentary rules, the nature and urgency of the bills under consideration, and practicalities such as time and expense. However, when it came to the time for urgent adoption of the legislation, the court noted that the timetable should be subordinate to the rights guaranteed in the Constitution. The court also noted that saving money and time in itself does not justify an inadequate opportunity for public involvement.

In *Matatiele Municipality and Others v President of the RSA and Others* (2007), the court held that the purpose of permitting public participation in law making is to afford the public an opportunity to influence the decisions of lawmakers, and therefore this requires lawmakers to consider the representations made and thereafter make an informed decision. Furthermore, the Constitutional Court rejected the argument that the public need not participate in the legislative process as its elected representatives are speaking on the public's behalf.

More recently, in *Mogale and Others v Speaker of the National Assembly and Others* (2023), the Constitutional Court examined the passage of the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Bill (2019) and ruled that it was constitutionally invalid due to Parliament's failure to facilitate public involvement. Similarly, in the case of *South African Iron and Steel Institute and Others v Speaker of the National Assembly and Others* (2022), the Court held that Parliament did not fulfil its mandate when passing the National Environmental Management Laws Amendment (2022), as amendments were not open to public comment.

TOOLS TO FACILITATE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

To address such challenges, Parliament began a process to consolidate and enhance its outreach and participation activities; an exercise which culminated in the Public Participation Model. Among proposed reforms to the rules and Parliament's strategic orientation, the Model distilled a list of principles and minimum standards

“Public Participation standards in line with the Constitutional prescripts and legal requirements include, informing, educating and creating meaningful opportunity for the public to participate in the decision-making of an issue that affects their lives. In addition, reporting, feedback and monitoring and evaluation becomes pivotal for the purposes of tracking the outcomes of a given public participation opportunity and thereby perpetually ensure effective public participation.”

Derived from the Constitution, the Rules of Parliament detail the way in which the two Houses conduct their business and set out the procedures and parameters of, inter alia, debate and decision-making, parliamentary committees, the passage of legislation and public participation. In terms of public involvement, the Constitution states that the Assembly and NCOP respectively may, within the context of their functions –

- “(a) determine and control their internal arrangements, proceedings and procedures; and
- (b) make rules and orders concerning its business, with due regard to representative and participatory democracy, accountability, transparency and public involvement.”

The Constitution adds that both Houses and their committees may “receive petitions, representations or submissions from any interested persons or institutions.”

Public Participation in Committee Proceedings

Committees are the engine-rooms of Parliament. It is committees that consider the details of legislation as well as engage ministers and departments on matters of administration. Consequently, committees provide the principal avenue for the public to influence decisions. To this end, all committees are open to the public and the media. The dates and agendas of meetings are also published weekly in a special notice. In the case of law-making, the rules provide that the public must be notified of all bills before they are introduced in the legislature with an invitation to make submissions. In the case of constitutional amendments, section 74(5) of the Constitution states that a person or committee intending to introduce a such a bill must, at least 30 days beforehand, give notice of the bill in the Government Gazette. Once a bill is introduced and referred to the relevant committee, the committee is again obliged to call for written inputs and, based on these inputs, arrange hearings. Such hearings take place within the precincts of Parliament, but committees can also convene elsewhere to assist those who may otherwise not have the means to travel.

Parliament typically considers hundreds of bills over the course of a five-year term. Nonetheless, some bills attract more interest than others. One such is the national budget. Public participation in the budget is subject to the Money Bills and Related Matters Act (2009) . Owing to the timebound nature of the budget, Parliament has been constrained in its ability to solicit comments on fiscal instruments and appropriations. There are other examples of bills such as the National Health Insurance Bill (NHI) – introduced in 2019 and signed into law in 2023 - which involved an enormous number of submissions and necessitated the utilisation of advanced data systems for analysis. In considering the NHI, the Portfolio Committee on Health received many thousands of written submissions, conducted public hearings in all nine provinces and heard oral testimony from over nine hundred sources. . These proceedings illustrate the appetite of the South African citizenry to contribute to policies and laws which affect their rights and livelihoods.

Public Petitions

The right of the public to petition Parliament has been upheld since the establishment of the first democratic Parliament. Previously, the rules stipulated that a petition could only be lodged by a parliamentarian, and not directly by any other person. Once lodged, petitions were subsequently referred to the respective oversight committee. These procedures proved problematic. First, there was a concern that citizens should not be restricted in their ability to raise matters with

Parliament. Furthermore, there were inconsistencies in the way the different committees responded to petitions.

Owing to the focus on improving public involvement, Parliament, in consultation with the nine provincial legislatures agreed on a new Petitions Framework. This, in turn, led to changes in the rules. The rules now allow the public, subject to certain substantive and technical requirements, to submit petitions directly to Parliament. Among the requirements is the condition a citizen should only approach Parliament as a last resort. In other words, they ought first to approach those public institutions which, by virtue of their mandates, may be better placed to immediately resolve disputes. A petition may also not concern a matter before the courts or seek to overturn a judgment. To ensure uniformity, both the Assembly and NCOP have elected to appoint special committees to consider petitions instead of referring these to different structures. The goal is for Parliament to conclude every petition within sixty days. There is also a commitment, in keeping with the need for feedback, that petitioners be informed at every stage of the parliamentary process. These reforms to have been supplemented by a call to reinforce Parliament's tracking of House resolutions, such as those that emanate from petitions, to ensure that any remedial actions directed at the administration are implemented with undue delay.

Targeted Interventions and Events

The democratic Parliament has always been cognizant of the fact that the participatory nature of the legislature is not universally understood. At the same time, many South Africans have remained unable to reach their representatives. For these reasons, previous Parliaments have arranged dedicated events to propagate the work of the legislature and facilitate inputs from specific communities and interest groups. The NCOP, for its part, initiated the concept of "Taking Parliament to the People." This involved the House meeting in remote localities to bring together the different spheres and arms of government so that ordinary residence would have the opportunity to interact directly with their leaders. Together with "Taking Parliament to the People" the legislature has also hosted targeted discussions with persons and organizations involved with women's rights, youth empowerment and persons with disabilities.

Public Access and the Media

Public access, education and communication play an essential role in any Parliament and especially those attempting to foster public awareness and involvement. Without information, participation is not possible. These imperatives have thus received particular attention in South Africa. As a start, the doors of Parliament were opened. A Public Education Office was founded to provide educational content and welcome visitors to the precinct. Additionally, the institution has steadily magnified its online footprint, from an interactive website

to an established presence on most major social media platforms. Almost all parliamentary proceedings are now broadcast. These developments have been augmented by frequent press briefings, media statements and educational programmes.

Over the past five years, Parliament introduced a new strategy to revitalize stakeholder engagements, media networks and the use of online resources. This included the expansion of Parliament television, from three to eighteen channels, as well as other media platforms. Media operations were abetted by the provision of better facilities on the precinct. Critically, this strategy enabled technological innovation and the hosting of online meetings – which proved indispensable during the Covid pandemic and, later, the fire which destroyed the National Assembly building in 2022. It is worth noting that, owing to the circumstances, the Assembly adopted a hybrid system, whereby members could attend sittings physically but also connect on a virtual platform. Public awareness and trust in Parliament are, of course, not solely dependent on access or communications – it requires multifaceted efforts from all involved in the affairs of the legislature.

Members in their Communities

The National Assembly is elected by proportional representation, as are each of the provincial legislatures. The reason South African opted for this system was to ensure that all the diverse constituents, which together constitute South African society, could find expression in Parliament. It was nevertheless acknowledged that this type of electoral system was not ideal for building links between members and their communities. To consolidate these connections, Parliament actively encouraged political parties to undertake community work through a system of constituency allowances, as per the Policy on Political Party Allowances. According to this policy, parties could be allocated funds to be ringfenced for constituency work. Beyond the allocations from Parliament, parties are also entitled to an allocation from the Independent Electoral Commission's (IEC) Represented Political Parties Fund (RPPF). These funds can be used “for any purposes compatible with the functioning as a political party in a modern democracy.” In addition to financial support, Parliament has allotted time in the parliamentary calendar for constituency work. During sessions, for instance, every Monday is set aside for members to be present in their communities. Outside of session, specific weeks are reserved for this purpose. The intention is to increase these windows in future.

While constituency offices have provided a network for the people to liaise with members, the prevailing arrangements have not been without limitations. First, there is a view that constituency officers have not been utilised effectively – either because communities are not aware of their presence or because there is little appreciation of their utility. In this regard, there is an initiative to explore the

procedural tools available to parliamentarians to advocate for constituency matters in the Houses. Such tools include petitions, questions to ministers and members' statements. As part of this initiative, Houses will concentrate on the undertakings made by ministers in response to member's concerns, including those from constituents. The task of pursuing executive undertakings has been allocated to the aforementioned petitions committees. Again, it will be important for constituents to remain informed of any outcomes arising from these proceedings. Another limitation with the constituency system is a lack of resources and weak accounting for funds spent. These shortcomings will necessitate closer scrutiny and policy reform. Lastly, there is a view that, whereas constituency offices have hitherto been considered essentially party political, they should still provide a public service, irrespective of anyone's party affiliation or preference. Parliament has embarked on a programme of reimagining and repurposing constituency offices as strategic points to build partnerships with communities.

Distinct from member's constituencies, Parliament also took a decision to establish Democracy Offices (PDOs) in each province. These offices, located in under-resourced and rural areas, have become focal points through which the institution disseminates information and channels public concerns. Among other activities, the PDO's host regular dialogues with local stakeholders and support committees in soliciting submissions on bills.

THE WAY FORWARD

The South African Parliament has taken important steps in its endeavour to realize the constitutional goal of a participatory, transparent and inclusive democracy. This has involved reforms to parliamentary procedure and practice as well as targeted interventions and outreach programmes. Recent years have also witnessed new challenges and opportunities, from the physical impediments imposed by Covid to the benefits associated with the uptake of technology. In the context of persistent socio-economic challenges, however, the newly elected Seventh Parliament has again emphasised the importance of meaningful public involvement. This need has been highlighted in recent studies which have revealed a general decline in the levels of public trust in democracy and the legislature. The graph below is reproduced from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS).

Owing to these perceptions and the risks associated with a loss of public confidence, the new Parliament has resolved to further refine its public engagements, improve the mechanism of petitions, expand the use of technology and repurpose and strengthen constituency offices. It is expected that these measures will lead to public involvement that both enriches decision-making and engenders trust in democratic government.

Ms Jeanette Emberson, Fiji, congratulated the speaker on the consultation procedures in place in South Africa and said that they were a source of inspiration. She said that a public consultation had been organised in her parliament but that it had not been as successful as hoped.

Ms Sarah Davies, UK, said the presentation had resonated with her because she is director of both Chamber processes and participation. She remarked on court cases affecting public engagement. She noted this has not had an impact in the UK as parliamentary privilege protects parliament. However, it has had a similar impact in Ireland. She asked if legislation needed to be introduced quickly, would you allow flexibility? Also, where parliaments enact an unnecessary but popular piece of legislation, how do the courts manage this? Would they challenge the parliament in this case?

Mr Ingvar Mattson, Sweden, said he was both puzzled and impressed by these procedures for public participation in the legislative process. He noted disadvantages around the time consuming and resource-heavy nature of the process. He also asked how urgent procedures are managed in this context?

Mr Syed Hasnain Haider, Pakistan, asked if there are any mechanisms in place for post-legislative scrutiny, to ensure the policies enacted are indeed beneficial to the public? Also, whether parliament receives feedback from the public on this point?

Mr Salim Djalal, Algeria, asked how the parliament balances public participation and speed for certain legislation?

Mr Xolile George, South Africa, explained that consultation procedures differ depending on the legislation. For example, not all legislation must be examined by both houses of Parliament or be subject to consultation with the provinces. When legislation must be examined by both houses, the courts ensure that each house has an adequate consultation process in place. Thresholds of ‘sufficiency’ and ‘relevance’ have been defined for the various public consultations. When the courts find that a consultation does not meet the thresholds, Parliament generally has 24 months to remedy the situation.

With regard to the speed of the legislative process, he acknowledged that consultation procedures are a real constraint. However, this difficulty encourages Parliament to adopt a more proactive approach, seeking to mobilise citizens in order to ensure their participation within the time limits set.

Finally, in response to Pakistan's question, he stated that post-legislative review had become a priority, particularly since 2015, when Parliament began assessing

the effectiveness of adopted laws. A 2017 report recommends revising laws when the assessment shows that they have not achieved their initial objectives.

GENERAL DEBATE: PARLIAMENTARY MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Dr Georg Kleeman, Moderator, opened the general debate.

- What should parliaments publish on social media (work related to parliamentary activity, international activity, etc.)?
- How can Parliaments manage their image on social media?
- Are there any rules governing the use of social media by parliamentarians or parliamentary staff during committee meetings or plenary sittings?

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, asked whether the fault lays with the parliament for not being interesting or with the people for not being interested.

Mr Antti Pelttari, Finland, remarked that all the Finnish parliament's public information is available online but that 1 year ago they banned Tik Tok on all parliamentary devices, both mobile devices of MPs and staff. Of course, they can still use this on their personal devices but parliament has made the decision for parliamentary devices. She said that, at all times, parliament survey social media sites and it is not enough to be present on one of the platforms, we must consider our presence on all of them. She said they are having a debate about the parliament's presence on X, it is no-longer a widely respected platform but it is still very popular. The parliament is currently till on X but it is a divisive platform politically, MPs both oppose and support the ongoing presence of the Finnish parliament on X.

Mr Georg Kleeman, Moderator, asked to clarify whether the Parliament of Finland promoted its work or debates on TikTok?

Mr Antti Pelttari, Finland, clarified that it is banned, TikTok is totally blocked on all devices and there is no channel for Parliament of Finland.

Mr Eric Tavernier, France, stated that he was speaking on behalf of the French Senate, not the French Parliament as a whole. He emphasised the growing importance of social media in reaching the general public, particularly young people under the age of 25. The Senate is present on all social media platforms,

including TikTok, despite the findings of a commission of inquiry into this social network.

He explained that each network is used differently: while LinkedIn is used to share long videos, particularly hearings, or to promote information reports, the Bluesky and X platforms are mainly reserved for breaking news (communication of the results of a vote or appointment). YouTube, Instagram and TikTok are mainly used to broadcast video clips or heritage content.

He explained that the Senate offers training to parliamentary staff and provides access to tools designed for social media, such as modules for cutting videos to make them easier to publish. The Senate also monitors social media to detect controversies or polemics as early as possible, particularly when they concern the use of public funds or the management of the institution.

Regarding the rules surrounding social media, he indicated that filming inside the chamber is prohibited in both the Senate and the National Assembly in order to ensure respect for the principle of dignity. He also reminded senators that they must stop using the communication tools provided by the Senate during election campaigns.

Finally, he specified that a guide to good practice would soon be published to better regulate the way in which parliamentary officials use their personal accounts to promote parliamentary activity. The promotion of legislative reports will be prohibited.

Mr Remco Nehmelman, Netherlands, remarked there are some ‘sad cases’ from his experience now that parliamentary debates are linked in live time with comments. As an SG, he said he receives lots of direct comments from the public, celebrities and former Members which are mostly negative. The freedom to speak does not mean everything should be allowed, there must be some boundaries. He said insults, threats and negative comparisons which incite hate and undermine authority, Parliamentarians react immediately to these jibes. Criticism of our institutions has always existed but it is also essential to maintain decency. Freedom of expression is a great privilege but freedom without respect is chaos. We need social media to be a palace to disagree without insulting each other and to keep our dignity.

Mr Jean-Philippe Brochu, Canada, pointed out that these platforms are primarily private companies, whereas parliaments are public institutions with different purposes. He gave the example of the Supreme Court of Canada, which recently decided to withdraw from platform X (formerly Twitter), illustrating a decision that was both strategic and political.

He explained that the House of Commons administration uses certain platforms, but to a limited extent, due to a lack of human resources for more extensive management. In comparison, parliamentarians themselves make more intensive use of social media, being present on platforms such as Facebook and TikTok, the latter being banned on House of Commons administrative devices.

The communication strategy is based on the principles of political neutrality (providing impartial information) and transparency (promoting access to parliamentary proceedings). However, he admitted that this positioning made their content unattractive, especially to young people, who no longer use these traditional platforms. He concluded by emphasising the need to rethink the use of social media if the goal is truly to reach younger generations.

Mr Mohamed ALMUTAIRI, Saudi Arabia, presented the Advisory Council's social media management strategy, indicating that a specialised administration was responsible for its implementation and monitoring. He specified that the Council was active on several platforms, including X (formerly Twitter), Instagram and Snapchat.

He explained that the main objective of this strategy was to strengthen communication between Parliament and citizens. To this end, a variety of content is disseminated (texts, videos, infographics) highlighting legislative activities in a clear, balanced and informative manner. The emphasis is on disseminating accurate information in order to avoid controversy and misinterpretation.

Rather than responding directly to negative comments, the administration prefers to publish reliable data to correct perceptions without fuelling the debate. Particular attention is also paid to the positive image of Parliament through careful visual communication.

Finally, he specified that the strategy is regularly monitored and that practices are continuously evaluated and adapted. The overall aim is to promote a positive and educational parliamentary culture among the general public.

Ms Steejit Taipiboonsuk, Thailand, explained that social media is used as a tool in Thailand to enhance transparency, disseminate information and engage the public in parliamentary life. Various content is regularly published, including parliamentary activities, international commitments, awareness campaigns, and live broadcasts of debates or preliminary sessions, particularly on Facebook.

The Thai Parliament is active on many platforms. She was keen to present a particular initiative, the series 'A Day in Parliament', which follows the Secretary

General in his daily life – from his home to work – with the aim of showing the public the reality of his duties. Although the format is short and not daily, it has been very successful and helps to bring citizens closer to the workings of Parliament.

In addition, some Thai MPs use TikTok to show behind-the-scenes footage of Parliament: the library, the canteen and committee activities. This unique content, rarely seen from the outside, attracts many subscribers and generates interest, particularly among younger generations. She emphasised that this type of communication reaches the public more quickly and effectively than traditional media such as newspapers or television. She concluded by saying that sharing unusual or little-known aspects of parliamentary work is an effective strategy for strengthening public interest and engagement.

Mr Simon Burton, UK, said that in the past, the Lords had been concerned about the use of social media in the context of impartiality. He remarked that the social media is both omnipresent and constantly changing. Like Finland, the UK Parliament has banned TikTok but this means that parliament is not ‘where’ young people are. He said there is a presence on TikTok for ‘House of Lords funny outtakes’ which has more followers than the main Twitter channel of the House of Lords, which has 500,000 followers.

The Lords is still on X but has recently opened a Blu Sky account, it only has 17,000 members. The Lords is analysing whether X is still an impartial platform. He concluded that they have provided guidance on using social media responsibly. However, the Lords has a lot of part-time Members. Lords must follow parliamentary procedures when acting in a parliamentary capacity but, when not acting in parliamentary context, they are still called a Lord but are not bound by the same rules in other parts of their lives. He said this duality is not well understood by the public.

He agreed with Mr Nehmelman that you cannot have freedom of speech without respect. He said it is incredibly easy to make things up and share them widely before it is fact checked.

He concluded by saying, asking why are we on social media, what is the point, is an excellent question.

Mr Damien Cesselin, Francophonie Assembly (APF), presented the specific characteristics of communication within the APF, which brings together 95 national and sub-national parliaments. He explained that the APF faces three major constraints: firstly, very limited human resources, with only one staff member responsible for communication (institutional, community management and relations with political authorities); secondly, multinational governance, which

requires institutional balances to be taken into account in communications; and finally, significant cultural diversity, both politically and in terms of digital practices.

He cited the example of Facebook, which remains a very popular platform in Africa, even though it is losing momentum in Europe. He indicated that the APF is currently present on Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram and LinkedIn and that discussions are underway on the advisability of joining TikTok. Despite reservations about the style of communication that this platform involves, it could be an effective lever for increasing the APF's visibility and reaching more young people and French-speaking civil society.

He explained that the APF operates with a staff composed of employees provided by member parliaments on the one hand, and contract staff recruited directly by the APF on the other. These agents have different communication practices. He mentioned the need to supervise certain individual initiatives, particularly those related to the use of personal accounts for recruitment purposes.

Finally, he specified that a crisis communication system had been put in place to avoid any uncoordinated or poorly controlled reactions in sensitive situations, particularly in relation to conflicts between member countries or security crises.

Ms Kareema Al-Abassi, Bahrain, asked two questions. She first asked whether the official website could be considered a social media platform. She then asked participants about best practices for attracting followers to a parliament's official social media accounts, particularly on Instagram, with the aim of promoting and raising awareness of parliamentary activities.

Mr Edgar Sequeira, Timor Leste, emphasised the importance of social media as a tool for transparency, civic education and citizen participation. He explained that Parliament uses Facebook and its parliamentary channel to publicise its work, based on a clear, accessible and visually consistent communication strategy.

He indicated that the public relations and communications division was responsible for managing digital content, which was mainly disseminated on Facebook and the parliamentary channel. Although there were not yet any specific regulations governing the use of social media by parliamentarians and civil servants during sessions, he pointed out that the principles of decorum and ethics also applied in the digital environment.

He explained that Parliament's objective was to strengthen public confidence, combat misinformation and promote dialogue with citizens, focusing on a structured editorial strategy, impartial, educational and relevant content, and a

visual identity. He concluded by emphasising that digital communication is now an essential resource, not only for informing, but also for promoting democratic exchange.

Mr Jean Mukuala Bateke, Democratic Republic of Congo, asked whether the use of social networks to disseminate information generates a lot of extra work for parliamentary staff?

Mr Sokveng Ngoun, Cambodia, shared his institution's experience in social media management, emphasising three aspects: practices, strategy and challenges encountered.

He specified that Facebook and Telegram are the two main platforms. Facebook is particularly widespread in the country, with more than 13 million subscribers out of a population of 17 million, making it a particularly effective communication tool. Telegram is used internally to provide senators with daily summarised information on the activities of parliaments around the world, saving them time and avoiding the need to seek out information in traditional media.

With regard to strategy, he emphasised the importance of transparent and balanced communication, but also highlighted the importance of the technical skills needed internally to develop this type of communication. Finally, he pointed out that despite the importance given to digital technology, the Cambodian Senate continues to use traditional media such as the press and television, with a view to adapting content to the expectations of the public.

Mr Masibulele Xaso, South Africa, specified that members of the South African Parliament are subject to a specific code of conduct on social media, but that no guidelines exist for administrative staff. He indicated that a code of conduct for staff was currently being developed.

The South African Parliament is present on the main platforms (X LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook and YouTube). He indicated that YouTube was widely used for live streaming of committee meetings and parliamentary debates.

In terms of audience, Parliament has over one million followers on X, around 149,000 on Facebook and 47,000 on Instagram. He acknowledged that there is room for improvement, particularly on Instagram, and that additional resources would help to strengthen the effectiveness of the digital strategy.

Dr Gabriel Gosiame Malebang, Botswana, explained that parliamentary communication was part of a centralised government communication and information system, which seconded staff to various institutions, including

Parliament. He specified that these seconded staff were subject to a code of conduct and ethics specific to this centralised system.

He said that the Botswana Parliament mainly used Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) for its social media communications. He noted in particular that he had not seen any cases where parliaments had a genuine dedicated communication strategy that extended to social media management, beyond simple general guidelines. He wondered whether some parliaments had implemented a proactive social media management or brand management strategy, and whether these strategies were aligned with those of central governments, where such alignment was relevant.

Referring to the case of Botswana, he pointed out that the separation of powers could sometimes be blurred, leading to a tendency to harmonise communication approaches with those of the government. Finally, he asked his colleagues about the possible existence of tools for managing perception and measuring impact with regard to the use of social media: is there any monitoring and evaluation of their effectiveness? And to what extent are these digital tools also used to educate the public, raise awareness of parliamentary work or strengthen parliamentary diplomacy?

Mr Salim DJALAL, Algeria, indicated that he would not present details on the use of social media in his country, as it did not differ fundamentally from what had already been explained by other delegations. However, he wished to share an observation drawn from the comments often seen under parliamentary posts on social media. In his view, these messages frequently come from specific groups within the population who use these spaces to make particular demands, often unrelated to the subjects debated in Parliament or the bills under discussion.

He gave the example of doctors seeking to change their status who post comments under posts dealing with completely different laws. He said this can be explained by the fact that citizens perceive social media as a direct channel to legislators or decision-makers, and sometimes even as the only way to make their voices heard.

Mr Georg Kleeman, Moderator, remarked that the discussion had been particularly rich and stimulating, revealing a wide variety of approaches depending on the country. However, he stressed that one of the major challenges for his Parliament remained that of making their communication more appealing. He also found some of the ideas put forward by the Thai delegation inspiring.

He then emphasised two crucial issues. Firstly, maintaining political neutrality, which emerged from the various contributions as a constant imperative that is difficult to reconcile with the proper use of social media. Secondly, combating hate

speech and disinformation, which several speakers also mentioned and which he considered particularly complex to manage.

He also drew attention to the growing pressure on communications teams, particularly to ensure the credibility of the content disseminated. He noted that all the parliaments represented in the room now used social media, which he nevertheless considered a positive sign.

Finally, he suggested that the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) consider conducting a comparative study on the use of social media in different parliaments, focusing on the platforms used, the types of information disseminated and the number of followers. This type of analysis could help to identify good practices to be shared. He concluded by acknowledging that there were still unresolved issues, such as the one raised by the delegation from Congo, but that these were perhaps topics to be explored in greater depth at future sessions.

5. Concluding Remarks

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, thanked colleagues for an excellent discussion and reminded them to return at 2.30 in the afternoon when there would be an election.

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 12:35

SIXTH SITTING

Wednesday 9 April 2025 (afternoon)

Dr Jose Pedro Montero, President, in the Chair

THE SITTING WAS OPENED AT 2.40PM.

1. Introductory remarks

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, welcomed everyone back to the sixth and final sitting of the ASGP. He summarised the agenda for the afternoon.

2. Presentation on recent projects undertaken by the IPU, Ms Kareen Jabre

The presentation given by Ms Kareen Jabre is available online here:

<https://asgp.co/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/1.-20250408-ASGP-IPU-final.pdf>

Mr Georg Kleeman, Germany, enquired whether the IPU has done any work on the use of social media in Parliaments, for example surveys on best practices by parliaments and parliamentarians worldwide? He said that the Association has discussed at length which social media channels parliaments, and parliamentarians, should use.

Ms Kareen Jabre, IPU, said that this has not been specifically examined by the IPU. It is touched upon in the e-parliaments report and in the context of gender sensitive parliaments. She confirmed she would be happy to investigate further collaborative work on this issue.

THEME: IN THE NEWS AND INNOVATIONS AT PARLIAMENT

3. Communication by Dr Remco Nehmelman, Senate of the Netherlands, 'The rule of law dialogue in the Netherlands'

Dr Remco Nehmelman presented the following communication:

Lessons from the Dutch State Commission on the Rule of Law

It is a privilege to speak with you today on behalf of the Netherlands. I will be presenting key insights from the 2024 report of the Staatscommissie rechtsstaat—the State Commission on the Rule of Law—titled “The Broken Promise of the Rule of Law”. The findings, while grounded in Dutch society, are highly relevant to any democratic state that aspires to govern fairly and justly.

I. The Dutch Context: A Brief Overview

Before diving into the report, let me briefly explain how our system works. The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy. Public administration is highly decentralized, with considerable power at the municipal level. Dutch society traditionally prides itself on consensus-driven governance, strong legal protections, and an emphasis on service delivery. However, in recent years, this reputation has been severely tested.

II. Why the Commission Was Formed

The Commission was established jointly by all three branches of government: executive, legislative, and judiciary—something unprecedented in Dutch history. It was prompted by a series of deeply damaging failures of the state. The most notorious example is the childcare benefits scandal, in which over 35,000 families—many with immigrant backgrounds—were falsely accused of fraud by tax authorities. Families lost homes, jobs, and even custody of their children. Similarly, in the Groningen region, gas extraction left homes damaged and lives disrupted, yet citizens were ignored for years. These cases reflect a broader truth: the rule of law is not working for everyone, particularly for those in vulnerable circumstances. Citizens feel powerless, unheard, and sometimes even afraid of the government. That is the broken promise the Commission set out to repair.

III. The Rule of Law: A Threefold Promise

The Commission defines the rule of law as a promise with three parts:

1. Protection from the state – Citizens must be safeguarded against abuse of power.
2. Influence over the state – Democratic participation must be meaningful.
3. Support by the state – Especially for those who need help to participate fully in society.

The harsh reality, however, is that these promises are not being met for all citizens. The rule of law has become too abstract, too distant, and too vulnerable to political neglect.

IV. Ten Proposals for Improvement

The Commission proposes ten structural reforms, directed at Parliament, the Cabinet, the judiciary, and public service bodies. Let me summarize just a few:

- **Strengthen Rule of Law Leadership:** Create an annual State of the Rule of Law Debate and establish a Rule of Law Planning Bureau to monitor progress and support policy innovation.
- **Empower Frontline Agencies:** Introduce a “red card” mechanism allowing implementing agencies to formally warn against policies that are unworkable or unjust.
- **Simplify Welfare and Legal Systems:** Many citizens avoid social benefits out of fear or confusion. The system must be made simpler and more humane.
- **Restore Access to Justice:** Reinvest in legal aid, restore the infrastructure of legal protection, and reduce court fees for individuals.

Each of these reforms aims to realign government with its foundational obligation: to serve and protect all citizens, not only the empowered or the well-informed.

V. The Rule of Law Dialogue: A New Democratic Practice

I now turn to what may be the most visionary proposal: the Rule of Law Dialogue. This is not about legal seminars or parliamentary debates. It is a deliberate, recurring, national dialogue—rooted in everyday experience—between citizens and the state. It should engage everyone from top judges and ministers to front-desk civil servants and vulnerable citizens in local communities.

Why is this so crucial?

Because the rule of law cannot be imposed from above. It must be co-created, nurtured through trust, and sustained by shared understanding. When the state listens—truly listens—it begins to heal the mistrust that has grown so dangerously in many democracies.

To operationalize this, the Commission recommends:

- Local dialogues in community centers, not just in capitals.
- Inclusion of experiential experts: citizens who’ve been through the justice or welfare system.
- Making this dialogue a formal part of policy formation, evaluation, and implementation.

As one citizen said during these dialogues: “The least I expect from the government is not to make things worse. But they did.” That level of despair demands not only administrative change but also human engagement.

VI. A Shared Responsibility

Finally, the Commission reminds us that the rule of law is not a technical domain—it is a shared civic space. While governments must lead by example, citizens also bear responsibility: to uphold the common good, to defend minority rights, and to participate in democratic life.

Thus, the rule of law is not only a legal concept. It is, as the Commission puts it, a political verb—it requires action, commitment, and care.

VII. Conclusion: A Message for All Democracies

Colleagues, the Dutch case may be specific, but the lesson is universal. When states lose sight of their most vulnerable citizens, the rule of law erodes—not in theory, but in daily life.

The Commission's report is a call to repair—not just institutions, but relationships. Not just laws, but trust.

Let us, together, commit to building states where citizens feel not fear, but fairness. Where rules protect rather than punish. Where government is not an obstacle, but a partner

Ms Claressa Surtees, Australia, asked whether the project will also include dialogue with schools and universities, so that the education process can begin at an early age? If not, could you say a little more about the approach?

Mr Ingvar Mattson, Sweden, remarked it is an issue which engages many people in Sweden, he commented that the approach to the problem is very broad. He asked whether the concept of the rule of law somewhat stretched? He opined that this set of values goes beyond the rule of law, that liberal values go beyond the rule of law. He asked why the three branches of government should co-operate on this project, which goes beyond a narrow conception of what the constitution is and whether there is a risk of grasping for a big thing, a very ambitious plan, and then realising that nothing comes out of it?

Ms Sarah Davies, UK, remarked on the ambition of the exercise and asked him to reflect on the follow-up? She noted the cause of the project was several large-scale cases of maladministration. She said this was reminiscent of issues in the UK such as the Post Office Horizon scandal and contaminated blood scandal. She commented that one of the reasons these cases came to light is due to the bravery of people who came forward to whistle blow and shed light on the real story. She asked whether the whistle blowers now feel part of this solution?

Mr Salim DJALAL, Algeria, asked to what extent do NGO's play a role in handling these cases? Secondly, what mechanisms are there to hold the concerned parties accountable if the rule of law principle is violated?

Dr Remco Nehmelman, Netherlands, responded to Australia that the Government itself has not replied to the findings of the committee, this is expected in the Autumn. The three branches of Government, represented by 15 people who lead all aspects of government, will meet in May with the Chair of the Commission to discuss what problems they can address and what has to be done. He remarked it is a good question because although Dutch schools do teach the rule of law, for most people who leave academia this is not a well-known topic. In general, normal people find legislation very difficult to read. It is often lawyers who know how to read and apply these rules. Vulnerable groups depend on the government and often don't understand laws. After the age of 18 years old, there is no more mandatory tuition on the rule of law. It may seem very theoretical, but it affects normal people seeking a grant from the government which is a part of daily life for many.

In response to Sweden, he noted there is a lot of cynicism in the Hague about engaging with people. He said they are looking for low hanging fruit when it comes to promoting democracy and the rule of law. In the opening week of parliament, the Hague held a 'week of the rule of law' with a presentation and theoretical performance. This brings in people to the Hague building to learn. It is the task of officials to explain the limits and possibilities of government, we need to open institutions, show people around and try to explain things better. Explain how the Monarch fits into a constitutional monarchy, what is legislation and how it works. He remarked there is generally a lot of widespread cynicism amongst the people about the government.

In response to the UK, he said the people who were the victims came and gave evidence to the committee, they were interviewed and invited to be involved with the project going forward.

In response to Algeria, he said that NGOs are not currently involved and that it can be very difficult to bring cases against the government.



THEME: THE USE OF PRECEDENTS TO PRESERVE PARLIAMENTARY MEMORY

4. Communication by Mr Eric Tavernier, French Senate

Mr Éric Tavernier presented the following communication:

Esteemed colleagues,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address a topic that is undoubtedly as old as parliamentarianism itself and yet is still relevant today: the role of parliamentary precedents and their use to preserve Parliament's memory.

In the French constitutional history, unwritten parliamentary law, which includes precedents, exists alongside written law. Even though the French Constitution of 1958, which established the instruments of rationalised parliamentarianism, appears in many respects to be the “standing orders” of the assemblies, the role of parliamentary precedents remains essential.

Today, the rules of the French Parliament are mainly written. In the current French Constitution, 35 articles deal with Parliament and its interactions with the Government. For example, the procedures allowing the National Assembly to challenge the Government's responsibility did not exist in the previous Constitutions. The procedure for censuring the Government first appeared in the Constitution of the Fourth Republic in 1946, then the 1958 Constitution codified even more aspects of the procedure, such as the number of signatures required or the fact that a Member of the National Assembly may not sign more than three no-confidence motions during the same ordinary session.

In addition to these constitutional provisions, there are institutional acts and ordinary laws, as well as the assemblies' Standing Orders and the instructions issued by their Bureaux. Together, these rules form a highly detailed and accurate set of requirements. If we add the Constitutional Council's case law, which carries out a mandatory review of the constitutionality of the parliamentary assemblies' Standing Orders, the scope for using parliamentary precedents in France may seem quite limited.

Although there are many instruments governing the French Parliament, they are not always suitable or sufficient to deal with the unexpected problems and situations that arise in our parliamentary assemblies. In this gap, precedents play a crucial role. They serve as record, for a particular situation, of how a rule has been interpreted or how a solution has been found when no rule exists. When an identical or a similar case arises, the previously established solution can be applied or transposed to it. (Slide 5) In the French Senate, a precedent takes the form of a written document providing a detailed description of a situation that has arisen: the consideration of a

bill, the use of a particular mechanism during a public session or a committee meeting, an exceptional event or even an incident during a public session. A precedent describes, for a given situation, which rules that were applied, how they were implemented, or, if needed, the decisions taken when no rule existed. Whether it is appropriate to set a precedent therefore depends on the complexity or uniqueness of the situation, from a legal or political standpoint. Choosing to set a precedent is therefore a way of preserving the memory of past situations so they can be referred to in the future to facilitate the political decision. We also consider situations from the National Assembly, but we do not look beyond our own borders to find out what happens in other parliaments.

In the French Senate, all precedents are recorded in an application, which is updated by civil servants working in the Sittings Division. They have a specific format and are classified by subject and by the articles of the Standing Orders of the Senate and the Constitution, making it easier to search for them in the application, which lists all the Senate's precedents since 1958. Because of the complete change of regimes, earlier precedents are no longer valid, but this practice dates back to the early days of the Republic.

This means that, today, the Senate has more than 3,800 precedents stored in digital format. During the three previous parliamentary terms, between 60 and 80 precedents were drafted each year.

These precedents are not publicly available. However, we disclose their contents when requested by a political authority. We also publish a selection of precedents in a section of our annual report, which is sent to academics, for example. The recipients, who are generally public law specialists, greatly appreciate this information. Precedents are mainly used by the Sittings Division, but they can also be used by members of Parliament and have a form of authority derived from consistent usage and practice. However, since they merely recount a past event and the rules applied to it, they are not legally binding for the future. This is why precedent differs from custom in French parliamentary law. It is only a decision-making tool for resolving a given situation, a kind of aide-memoire. The French constitutionalist Marcel Prélôt, who was member of the National Assembly and later senator, said that “the real way – perhaps the only way – to understand parliamentary law is to experience it”. As we are not able to experience them all, parliamentary precedents allow us to preserve the memory of past situations, so we can refer to them in the present and record them for the future.

So, when can we use precedents to preserve the memory of our parliamentary assemblies?

In my opinion, precedents fulfil three types of function in the French Parliament. They have a regulatory function, by ensuring that practices and interpretations are applied consistently, regardless of the government in power or current events. They have a creative function, when no applicable rule exists. And they have an interpretative function, by helping to interpret the rules and implement them in practice.

Firstly, precedents ensure that practices are applied consistently over time. For example, the dissolution of the National Assembly announced by the President of the French Republic on 9 June 2024 prompted a need to refer to parliamentary precedents to determine the impact of this decision for the Senate, particularly in terms of how it organised its work. In line with the precedents of 1981, 1988 and 1997, the years of the last dissolutions of the National Assembly, the Senate decided to adjourn its work in plenary sitting.

On this occasion, the President of the Senate pointed out that the Senate nevertheless ensured “the continuity of national representation” and that, as such, it was able to meet “at any time during this period of dissolution”. He made this announcement based on statements given during previous dissolutions. The Senate also decided that its committees and delegations would continue their monitoring and evaluation work during this period. Precedents can also be used as a reference in the event of exceptional circumstances which, even where they do not raise legal difficulties, create situations where organisational issues arise. In March 2024, when Parliament met in Congress in Versailles to adopt the constitutional bill on the right to have access to voluntary termination of pregnancy, it was necessary to bring together relatively old organisational and procedural elements, since the last meeting of Parliament’s Congress to revise the French Constitution was held in 2008. Here again, the proceedings of this new Congress meeting led to the drafting of a precedent.

The use of precedents can also be a useful tool when it comes to policing the assembly, particularly within the Chamber, such as deciding what to do when there are disturbances in the visitors’ galleries, when people wear certain outfits, and so on. Besides being of historical interest, precedents are also useful for resolving those protocol issues that may occasionally arise. For example, the visit of King Charles III to the French Senate on 21 September 2023 set a precedent. While organising this event, the Senate departments were able to refer to Queen Elizabeth II’s visit to the Senate in 2004. However, unlike the Queen, King Charles addressed members of Parliament in the Senate, which was unprecedented for a foreign sovereign. This was of course recorded in a precedent, which the Senate departments drew up and will be able to refer to in the future.

Furthermore, regarding a precedent's creative function, I would like to mention an example of a practice developed in 1986 that resulted in an amendment to the Standing Orders of the Senate. These Standing Orders allow a motion called a "preliminary question" to be debated when a piece of legislation is first considered.

If it is adopted, the legislation is rejected in its entirety, immediately halting its discussion. Although it was traditionally adopted to oppose the substance of a bill, in 1986 Senators adopted, for the first time, a preliminary question on a bill they largely supported. Adopting this motion ensured that the bill would not be amended by the Senate and that the procedure would continue toward an adoption. This is how the "positive" preliminary question came into being. After the Constitutional Council ruled that using a preliminary question for "positive" reasons did not constitute a procedural irregularity, the Senate decided to amend its Standing Orders in 1991 to address the consequences of this practice.

Since then, it has stipulated that the "preliminary question" is a motion aimed to decide either that the Senate opposes the legislation as a whole or that there is no need to continue debating it.

Lastly, in their interpretative function, precedents help to clarify the procedures for applying a written rule. For example, Article 11 of the French Constitution states that the President of the Republic may submit a bill to a referendum on the joint proposal of the National Assembly and the Senate. This joint proposal must be based on a motion adopted by both assemblies.

The Constitution does not outline the procedure for examining this motion, which is specified by the Standing Orders of the National Assembly and the Senate. However, not all the procedures for applying this constitutional provision are set out in the Standing Orders. For example, they do not specify whether tabling the motion suspends discussion of the bill in question.

In the absence of any mention in the Standing Orders, it is up to the President of the Senate, who has the power under the Standing Orders to suspend or close the sitting at any time, to decide whether or not to allow the debate to continue. In such situations, precedents are useful for applying the Constitution and the Standing Orders. For example, in cases where the bill had already been discussed before the motion was tabled, the debate on the bill was sometimes suspended (in 1997), and sometimes continued after the motion had been tabled but before it was debated (in 2003 and 2009).

These precedents formed the basis for the decision that, when such a motion was tabled as part of the pension reform in 2023, the general debate on the bill would continue until the motion, scheduled for the following day, was considered.

Overall, given the sheer number of rules applicable to Parliament, combined with the diversity of situations and configurations a political assembly experiences, the use of parliamentary precedents is essential.

At our last October meeting, I had the opportunity to take the floor about artificial intelligence. This technology is likely to provide us new tools for searching, classifying and analysing data, that could be very helpful to take advantage of parliamentary precedents and to apply them to situations that our assemblies face. The increasingly frequent change of our legal system and the fluctuating political landscape, illustrated by the current situation in the French Parliament, make it more essential than ever to preserve Parliament's memory by recording and learning from precedents.

These precedents help to keep our parliamentary law stable and understandable, also allowing us to adapt and innovate. They help us to see our current challenges more clearly by telling us how our predecessors solved similar problems. Thank you

Mr Jean-Philippe Brochu, Canada, said the system in Canada is based on the Westminster system, which is a very different system. He asked what form precedent takes in the Senate. For example, common practice, written decision which is handed down by the Speaker of the House? He noted that in the Parliament of Canada there is a joke that precedent can be created in strange ways. If something happens once it is an example, if something happens twice it is a precedent, if it happens three times it is a well-established precedent.

Mr André REZSOHAZY, Belgium, pointed out that the Belgian system was based on the French model of the Fourth Republic. He explained that Belgium had set about preserving precedents, which involved digitising them and classifying them logically, so that all lawyers would have access to these unwritten rules. In Belgium, precedents make it possible to fill certain regulatory gaps.

He then referred to two precedents that are regularly used in Belgium. Firstly, the unanimity rule: a unanimous assembly does not vote, which in some cases makes it possible to circumvent the Rules of Procedure. Secondly, the precedent that parliamentary committees follow the same rules as plenary sessions.

With regard to judicial review, he pointed out that the Belgian Constitutional Court does not censor laws on procedural grounds. He questioned the situation in France, in particular the possibility for the courts to exercise control over the procedure and, in particular, over the implementation of parliamentary precedents.

Ms Sarah Davies, UK, complimented the French system for keeping detailed records of precedent, maintained with rigour. She asked how France deals with bad precedents? For example, when colleagues make a mistake. For example, a colleague once put a time limit on in the Committee of the Whole House, which was incorrect. Similarly, a chair applying a decision against clerk advice as to the precedent. She asked how that information is recorded? How political and embarrassing aspects are recorded and managed?

Mr Éric Tavernier, France, pointed out that parliamentary precedents are not customs in the strict sense of the word, but rather constitute a ‘soft law’, i.e. a set of rules that are enforceable as long as they are not challenged. He emphasised that British parliamentary custom seemed more solid and enduring.

He indicated that, when it comes to applying a new rule, he systematically assesses the risk of challenge. If this risk is high, the President decides. He explained that in the vast majority of cases, there is no formal decision by the Bureau: precedents are based on verbal discussions, which are then transcribed in the form of administrative notes, giving them a certain degree of flexibility.

In response to Belgium, he indicated that the French Constitutional Council reserves the right to monitor compliance with parliamentary procedure, to verify that the rights of the opposition (right to speak, right to amend) have been respected. Even if the members of the Council do not always have a precise knowledge of how assemblies work, he emphasised that the Constitutional Council now includes more former parliamentarians. This composition is a double-edged sword: it guarantees a better understanding of internal practices but can also lead to greater leniency, particularly in cases where the procedure has not been strictly applied in response to an exceptional situation.

Finally, in response to the United Kingdom, he acknowledged that errors could occur, particularly when officials failed to consult precedents. He emphasised the importance of institutional memory, particularly that of the most experienced officials, in order to avoid such errors.



5. Communication by Mr Antti Pelttari, Parliament of Finland

Mr Antti Pelttari presented the following communication:

Preserving Oral History of Eduskunta – Project to interview former Members of Parliament

Dear President, dear colleagues!

Oral History came to Finland as a new trend in history writing in the 1980s. It was not necessarily accepted by the entire community of professional historians, being rather supported by certain activists. They noticed a total lack of interviews concerning recent political history in Finland. Something had to be done.

Former Members of Parliament were suggested as a target group for a pilot project aimed at collecting Oral History knowledge from Finnish decision-makers. In 1988, a more permanent project was launched with the Library of Parliament. This project has been active without major breaks for 37 years now.

Today, we have over 500 interviews with former MPs at the Oral History archive. From 12 to 15 new interviews are conducted every year. The Oral History collection is of massive size. It would take four months, day and night, to listen through all the audio files of the interviews one after another.

The interviews cover the time period from the 1950s to the present well. The oldest memories reach back to the 1920s, but reminiscences from pre-Second World War era are few.

The coverage of the interviews through the decades is well presented in this figure. The red bar shows the growing number of interviews in a timeline divided into parliamentary terms. More than half of the MPs from the terms 1966 to 2003 have been interviewed. The peak is reached in the term 1983-1986, out of which 157 of 200 MPs have been interviewed.

The interviews with the former MPs are relatively long, lasting from a couple of hours to even 20 hours. They are based on a semi-structured interview schedule that has a common list of interview themes but no standard questions. The interviewer edits the interview themes in advance according to the career of the interviewee.

During the interview, it is the interviewer's duty to lead the dialogue with open questions and be ready to ask clarifying questions. His or her role in the process is significant insomuch that the interviewer and the interviewee have been said to share authority over the final product.

In this slide we can see the main themes of the interview. Our approach is biographical starting from childhood and ending at the present time when the interview is conducted. We focus, naturally, on the years as a full-time politician in the parliament and the European parliament. The length of the interview simply depends on the talkativeness of the MP.

Olli Nepponen, a former Member of Parliament, was interviewed at the Library of Parliament in 2016.

Since we are not able to interview all the former MPs, there must be a selection. We aspire to interview the most long-standing and experienced MPs who have progressed to powerful positions. In addition to that, we have also interviewed personalities with shorter parliamentary careers. Equal party political and regional representation must naturally be considered. The share of interviewed female MPs, 31 %, may appear low if related to the present situation. During the first decades of our coverage, however, the share of women in politics was remarkably lower than nowadays.

The interviews at our Oral History archive are not open to the public. They can be used for scientific purposes by the students and scholars who have applied for permission. Our policy differs from the British project whose interviews can be listened to via the British Library. In recent years, our interviews have been used as source materials for a wider range of different studies than earlier. A reason for this has been an academic project that has united all the interview texts into a database that allows search engine functionality and produces grammatically parsed results. After this improvement, big data analysis and data mining have become possible approaches. How AI can support the interview process and offer new dimensions to the usage of the interviews is yet to be seen.

Since the beginning of the project in the late 1980s, producing Oral History knowledge at the parliament has been done in cooperation with the academic community. All the interviewers, for example, have been professional historians. Both the parliament institution and the academic community have benefited from the long-lasting project. The parliament offers the Oral History sources to the academic community, which produces its own critical interpretations in feedback. The key role of the MPs as realizers of the people's will in the democratic process is emphasized while the interviewees themselves are supported in their identity building as former parliamentarians.

I will finish my presentation with a quote from Professor Markku Jokisipilä that has crystallized the meaning of the Oral History work at the parliament as follows:

“The Oral History Archive of the Parliament forms the collective memory of Finnish parliamentarism, shedding light more comprehensively than any other source on what kind of institution the Parliament is, what it is like to be a Member of Parliament in Finland, and how politics has changed over the years.

Mr Éric Tavernier, France, said that in the Senate they work with civil servants, in a less systematic way, and question civil servants over a long period of time. He

said it is the head of the archive who questions them. However, the retired civil servants answers are kept somewhat secret.

Mr Georg Kleeman, Germany, asked about the most interesting point raised by one of the older MPs about life as a politician in Finland?

Ms Claressa Surtees, Australia, noted the material collected is confidential and can only be used only for specific purposes. She asked whether politicians might be reticent about being frank? How do you overcome this, is there a delay to reflection on current topics?

Mr André REZSOHAZY, Belgium, said he has a hypothesis that Finland has a long history of ethnographic research and folkloric history. He wondered how this project fits into the long history of ethnographic research in Finland. He asked whether each MP is asked to summarise their views?

Mr Antti Pelttari, Finland, specified that the programme currently only concerned parliamentarians. He added that interviews were also being conducted with civil servants, but that these were only on an ad hoc basis. In response to Belgium, he explained that the project, initially proposed by a professor specialising in oral history in the 1980s, was part of a historical and ethnographic approach specific to Finland. He indicated that the interviews were conducted by professional historians and that one person worked full-time to maintain the database.



6. Communication by Mr Pedro Agostinho de Neri, National Assembly of Angola

Mr Pedro Agostinho de Neri presented the following communication:

On behalf of the National Assembly of Angola and on my own behalf, we would like to greet all those present at this great event, which brings together all the Secretaries-General of the IPU parliaments.

Allow us also to send a special greeting to the organizers of the Event, for the welcome and hospitality with which they have offered us since our arrival in this place.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

It is with great appreciation that we address our congratulations for the opportunity to choose the theme of our meeting – which we called “Parliamentary Precedent”.

We are confident that this topic will provide a proactive debate and sharing of information on the most diverse aspects that shape today’s activity of our parliaments, inside and outside what is enshrined in our legal instruments of operation.

We recall here, Ladies and Gentlemen Secretaries-General, that as guardians of the material and immaterial heritage of our Parliaments, our mission and action must be aimed at preserving good parliamentary practices and rituals, so that they may be passed on from generation to generation.

The Parliamentary Precedent, which we in Angola refer to as Parliamentary Custom, thus has an invisible legal force that presides over the day-to-day of our institutions, including the organizational and protocol aspects resulting from parliamentary work, as the Plenary Meetings, the activities of the Bureau, the Conference of Parliamentary Groups and the Parliamentary Working Committees.

Therefore, we consider it relevant to state that the parliamentary custom refers specifically to practices, conventions and traditions established over time within the functioning of our legislative institutions.

As we all know, these practices play an important role in the organization and dynamics of parliamentary work, although they are not formally codified in laws or regulations.

These customs also help to ensure the continuity and stability of the legislative process, providing a reference framework for the performance of parliamentarians, even in the absence of formal rules.

On the other hand, we must be aware that parliamentary customs may vary from one country to another and in some cases may change over time as new practices emerge and are effectively accepted.

It is in this perspective that we take this opportunity to share with our colleagues that, in the Angolan Parliamentary context, Article 2 of Law N^o 13/17, of 6th of July, which approves the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly of Angola, as having validity and legal force, provided that:

- There is no regimental rule applicable.
- Does not contravene the Constitution of the Republic of Angola.
- Does not violate the dignity of the human person; and

- Do not offend the guiding principles of parliamentary activity.

In fact, we wish to note to all present that the assumptions we have just enumerated operate as limits to the validity of parliamentary custom and the application of any precedent.

Therefore, as mentioned above, the customs, as repeated and accepted practices among parliamentarians, find, as a rule, solutions to issues not expressly addressed by the Rules of Procedure and other laws in force.

We believe that, as other parliaments, whose administrations we represent here, parliamentary customs may include several moments, among which, in the case of Angola, we highlight:

1. The constitution of the Bureau at the Constituent Meeting of the National Assembly, which may result from a political negotiation between the parties or political coalitions with parliamentary seats, as happened at the beginning of the Legislature in September 2022.
2. The voting procedure, which, in our case, can be done virtually, that is, by videoconference, being this a specific form of participation of the MPs in parliamentary activities, which, although it is not regimentally consecrated, had been settled since COVID-19.
3. The Agenda of Plenary Meetings, which is discussed in the Conference of Presidents of the Parliamentary Groups, in which the political representatives of the parliaments participate, even if they are not constituted in parliamentary groups, which are granted the right to vote, although this power is not enshrined in the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly.

MR PRESIDENT,
ESTEEMED COLLEAGUES,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

These are just a few examples that we try to share in this hemicycle. Nevertheless, we would like to present you with another example of how our cultural traditions can be consolidated and elevated to the status of parliamentary custom.

We are referring specifically to the symbology and signalling of GONGO, at the time of the entrance of the President of the National Assembly and special guests in the Plenary Hall.

The GONGO is a sound instrument used in African tradition and other parts of the world to announce solemn events.

For this reason, the National Assembly of Angola, rescuing the African culture in general and Angolan, in particular, adopted GONGO as its sound instrument, whose beat signals, as we underlined above, the approach or entry of the highest Entity of our Parliament and other invited entities.

The GONGO is thus used to signal the antechamber of the Plenary Meetings of work or solemn, being that the latter may occur, either by constitutional imperatives, on the occasion of the opening of the legislative year, when the President of the Republic of Angola delivers the speech on the STATE OF THE NATION, either in official visits of Heads of State and Presidents of Parliaments of other countries.

Therefore, Mr President, these examples of the Angolan parliamentary custom that we have highlighted here are just some of the precedents or rituals recorded in official documents of our Parliament.

We could list others, among these, the method of distribution of documents to Members, made by electronic means, which, although not enshrined in the Rules of Procedure, has been implemented since 2016, the result of the process of dematerialization and technological modernization of our Parliament, which contributed greatly to the speed of procedures and economies of scale.

Finally, we thank you once again for the opportunity to share our experience with your distinguished colleagues, hoping that the teachings we receive and will receive on the custom or parliamentary precedent can produce valuable contributions that awaken among us the importance of preserving the institutional memory in our respective parliaments.

On behalf of the Angolan Parliament, we thank you for your attention.

Thank you very much.

Mr Jean-Philippe Brochu, Canada, remarked on the use of Ngongo to make announcements in the Congress and enquired whether Angola shares traditions with any other lusophone assembles which could be shared with the Assembly today?

Mr Pedro Agostinho de Neri, Angola, responded that it is an old instrument used to announce or sign the highest meeting of elders. It calls to attention that the highest entity is meeting and indicated everyone should stand up because very important issues are being discussed. This affirms for the people that the Assembly is the place where decisions are made, it is the house of the people, where people sit together and make important decisions. He remarked that Ngongo was also used in Congo.



7. Administrative Questions

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, reminded colleagues that at the meeting in Geneva, the terms of office of Ms Fiona Kalemba and Mr Amado Thimbo on the Executive Committee would be coming to an end. Consequently, the Executive Committee proposed that two places as ordinary member on the Executive Committee be open for election at the next meeting in Geneva in the autumn.

He then presented the composition of the Executive Committee following the elections held the previous day. He emphasised that, according under the Rules, the Executive Committee should, as far as possible, reflect the linguistic and geopolitical diversity of the Association, while respecting gender balance.

He noted that, following the departure of Ms Fiona Kalemba and Mr Amado Thimbo, women and French speakers were at risk of being under-represented on the Executive Committee.

8. Draft agenda for the next meeting in Geneva in October 2025

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, said that the next meeting of the Association would take place in Geneva in October 2025. He then presented the titles of the proposed themes and general debates for the next conference:

General Debates

1) How does your parliament provide factual information to parliamentarians to support evidence-based decision-making?

- Do you have a library or specialist team in parliament which advises Members on statistics, fact or policy?
- Does your parliament work in partnership with external bodies (media, fact-checkers, academic institutions) to address misinformation?
- How do you decide what information to provide to parliamentarians? Is information provided in response to demand from Members or does each piece of legislation have a standard package of accompanying information?
- What measures has your parliament taken to proactively combat and counter misinformation that may affect parliamentary debate or public trust?

2) What measures has your parliament put in place to mitigate the risk (cyber, security etc) of a future event preventing debate in the Chamber?

- What types of risks (institutional, human, technological, etc.) are currently considered a priority within your parliament?
- What measures or procedures have been implemented to prevent or manage these risks?
- Has your parliament designated a specific body or individual responsible for risk management?
- What good practices have emerged from recent risk-mitigation situations within your parliament?

Themes:

- Ensuring the safety of MPs and parliamentary staff
- Preparing for the retirement of long-serving staff
 - In the news and innovations at parliament

The Assembly approved the draft agenda.



9. Concluding remarks

Dr José Pedro MONTERO, President, thanked all Secretaries General for their participation and thanked the secretariat and interpreters whose hard work make the meeting possible.

Before closing the session, he said it was an honour to chair his first meeting as President of the Association and raised, again, the sad death of Mr Roy Ngulube, Secretary General of the National Assembly of Zambia. He told colleagues that the Executive Committee had agreed to write to the Speaker of Zambia to express condolences on behalf of the Association.

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 5:20PM