



DE NATIONALE  
ASSEMBLÉE  
VAN DE REPUBLIEK SURINAME



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
For democracy. For everyone.

ASGP  
ASSOCIATION OF SECRETARIES  
GENERAL OF PARLIAMENTS

# Report on the 146<sup>th</sup> International Parliamentary Union Assembly as well as the ASGP-meeting, which was held in *Manama of the Kingdom of Bahrain*

A Collection on the presented informative communications during  
the ASGP-meeting on the general theme: Promoting peaceful  
coexistence and inclusive societies: *fighting intolerance*

[11-15 march 2023]

Sharing knowledge, to develop and strengthen The National Assembly of the  
Republic Suriname, helps building a modern and better functioning parliament

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



Report written by Rattan Naresh, ALGOE, MPA, LL.B



**Background information:**

The Author attended the 146<sup>th</sup> IPU as well as the ASGP-meeting. This Report provides a collection of presentations known as communications on selected topics on the afore mentioned general theme.

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## Thank word, structure Report and methodology

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

I begin my brief remarks by extending my deepest commendations to the IPU for the successful hosting of this critical meeting of the Secretary General's from various national Parliaments. I therefore, also like to emphasize that it is a great pleasure for me to participate on behalf of The National Assembly of the Republic Suriname the ASGP-program me. On behalf of The National Assembly of the Republic of Suriname I attended this 146<sup>th</sup> IPU ASGP-meeting with the delegation under: *mr. A. Gajadien, delegation leader, ms. Nisha Jhakry, and mr. M. Bouva, supported by the Expert International Relations from the International Relation Department of The National Assembly ms. Asna Jairam-Radjaram.* A thank word goes to His Excellence mr. M. Bee, MSc., LL.B., Speaker and ms. Ruth de Windt, Secretary-General of The National Assembly of Suriname for their influential role. It was a wonderful and inspiring experience to meet so many colleagues from all over the world. As last I would like to extend my gratitude to the Kingdom of Bahraini for hosting the ASGP-secretariat for organizing this conference in an excellent way.

This Report is a comprehensive as well as informative document, compiled on the bases of shared communications on the general theme during the ASGP-meeting. The methodology I used for compiling this Report, is by presenting the communications exactly as they were presented during the Program me, as well as they are uploaded on the website of ASGP. Therefore, I refer readers, if interested, to download the fully presentations which are available at: <https://www.asgp.co/future-meetings?page=1>.

This Report fundamentally aims to share knowledge with The National Assembly of the Republic of Suriname and others outside the Assembly. A recommendation for the Assembly is to assess the phase the Assembly is today and what still needs to be conducted or implemented in order to develop and/or strengthen the Assembly into a modern functioning inclusive, participatory, accountable, effective, open as well as democratic [green] parliament.



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Table: Analysis regarding topics to develop and strengthen The National Assembly of the Republic Suriname towards building a modern and better functioning parliament<sup>1</sup>

No.	Subject	<i>Analysis [and/or Action which shall] to be taken into account</i>		
	Topics	Key-elements	Allotted Department in the National Assembly of Suriname	Decision
1	Participation of citizens in the work of The National Assembly [Engaging citizens]	<p>The <b>Parliament as a public space</b> where the public is engaged with their elected representatives and participate in governance and decision-making processes that affect them is fundamental to participatory democracy.</p> <p><b>Public engagement, access to parliament by the citizens is imperative in a democracy, effective representation, public participation, effective democratic parliaments, such as broadcast its sessions via television or radio, most now have websites, and publications designed to help include citizens in the policy process.</b></p> <p><b>Programs as:</b> <i>uSpeak, Speak4Yourself, Speak FREE, SMS based platform, Make your voice heard!</i></p> <p><b>Information and Education, Consultation and Involvement and Feedback</b></p> <p>E-petitions, Petitions Committee, relate e-petitions to the Petitions Committee, Public engagement and petitions.</p>	<i>Judicial Office, ICT, Communication and Information, DIV.</i>	
2	Committee system of in The National Assembly	Constitution, Standing Order and other related laws	<i>Judicial Office, Secretary-General, Deputy Secretary-General</i>	

<sup>1</sup> This Table will be filled-out in accordance with the Strategic Policy Plan [2022-2026].



3	Electing and Executive President by The National Assembly in extraordinary circumstances	Constitution and other related laws	Judicial Office, Secretary-General, Deputy Secretary-General	
4	The National Assembly of Suriname thinking Green and it's eco-friendly working place	<p><b>The Green National Assembly of Suriname in combatting climate change.</b></p> <p>COP27, Carbon market and Carbon tax, parliamentary Action on Climate Change, developing policies and laws that promote sustainable development, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and encourage the transition towards renewable energy, SDG, engaging stakeholders such as NGOs, businesses, and academic institutions to collaborate on sustainable initiatives that benefit both the environment and the economy, Green Assembly: measures taken to protect nature and the green: usages of electric vehicles in contributing to the reduction of carbon emission, giving weight to <b>aromatic plants</b> to save irrigation water and contributes to the ecosystem in the garden of the Assembly. The use of <b>plastic</b> glasses, forks and spoons has been restricted within the Parliament, minimizing the use of plastic products., feed our non-human friends such as cats, dogs, and squirrels etc. <b>Non- hazardous waste</b> (paper, plastic, glass, metal) is segregated in our Assembly within the scope of the Zero Waste projects, contributing to the environment. Enhancing its Secretariat to become <b><u>"eco-friendly workplace"</u></b>.</p>	WPO, ICT, IB, all	
5	Gender inequality in The National Assembly and solutions	<p>What are the obstacles to achieving gender parity in parliaments?</p> <p>What solutions are being implemented in your parliament?</p>	WPO, Communication and Information,	





		How are members of staff protected from bullying and sexual harassment?		
6	Thinking about Online voting in The National Assembly	Voting is a central element of democratic parliamentary activity. While debate is the parliamentary instrument that allows members to express their various political opinions, voting is the mechanism used to express the wishes of the parliament, through the adoption of agreements.	WPO, ICT,	
7	Members of The National Assembly and conflict of interest	what constitutes a conflict interest? should MPs be able to work in other roles while also being parliamentarians? which jobs add value to the work of parliamentarians? how do we manage conflicts of interest: what are the rules for MPs? what are the rules for parliamentary staff and assistants?	Members of Parliament, ICT, WPO,	
8	e-initiative: The National Assembly in empowering voters to lodge a bill through digital platform	Transforming itself into a <b>SMART Parliament</b> , emphasizing digital development within the office. Majoring in Computer Science to join the brainstorming session on designing and developing the digital platform for the initiative process. Develop an in-house web-based application called 'e-Initiative' as a new platform for facilitating the people's initiative process.		
9	The National Assembly of Suriname: <i>Use of ICT in promoting transparency, accessibility, efficiency and economy</i>	Robust ICT infrastructure and facilities to MPs. Internet, high speed LAN, Wi-Fi, The National Assembly Home Page, television, Digitization of parliamentary documents, Parliament Digital Library, e-Payment, Members' Portal, e-Notice application, e-Wisdom e-Office, Reduction in circulation of papers, e-Portal, Intranet.	Library, DIV, ICT,	





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## 1. Bahrain's Parliamentary Group welcome message

The legislative authority in the Kingdom of Bahrain is pleased to welcome the speakers of parliaments, parliamentarians, and delegates from various countries of the world, to participate in the 146<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU], held in Manama, the capital of the Kingdom of Bahrain from 11-15 March 2023. IPU provided opportunities for the community of parliaments under the umbrella of this Union, to meet and stand on a common base, opening broad horizons of dialogue aimed at strengthening parliamentary efforts, within the framework of the general theme of "Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies: Fighting intolerance".

The environment incubating peace, coexistence and love in the Kingdom of Bahrain represented an opportunity for all parliaments that are members of IPU-ASGP to benefit from the Assembly held in Manama, to deliver an influential voice to the international community, and to advance for broad global influences to promote the principles of peace, dialogue, and rapprochement, in a way that serves the people of the world and achieves security and stability. The Kingdom of Bahrain is keen to provide all the requirements for success, to take the necessary measures, and to provide all facilities to the participating parliamentarians, in a way that guarantees achieving the desired goals and objectives of IPU in Manama.

The questions was: how do we **coexist**? In a world that goes faster and faster, with growing complexities on a global scale? Parliaments are all interconnected, we are all entwined but interconnection does not mean coexistence. Interconnection is a fact, coexistence is a choice. How to turn a fact into a choice? By restoring faith in single human beings by protecting them in their lives, in their beliefs, in their rights. Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies is a task that requires our constant attention. It requires continuous efforts to adapt mindsets, legislation and policies to the transformations taking place in the political, social, economic and security environment.

Parliaments, by virtue of their representative nature, have a vital role in countering hatred and intolerance, in promoting a model of society that embraces diversity and respects human dignity. IPU action is all the more urgent since racism, hate speech, discrimination, in all their manifestations and forms, particularly in the digital sphere, have been on the rise in last years, exacerbated by the multiple challenges before us: economic and security crises, climate change, and the post-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this regard countries needs to be fully engaged in efforts to fight intolerance and has continually strived to act as an example in this matter. Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies by fighting intolerance is essential for creating a more cohesive, democratic and resilient world. Therefore, it is imperative that as representative of our people it is important to take necessary steps to address challenges, and the IPU commitment to promote cohesion and inclusion as important step towards building a more peaceful and prosperous future for all.



## 2. The 146<sup>th</sup> IPU-ASGP

On 16 August 1939 the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments [ASGP] met first in Oslo and is constituted as a consultative body of the Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU].

IPU 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 IPU 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. ASGP seeks to facilitate personal contact between holders of the office of Secretary General in any Parliamentary Assembly, whether such Assembly is a Member of the Union or not. The main task of ASGP is to study the law, procedure, practice and working methods of different Parliaments and to propose measures for improving those methods and for securing cooperation between the services of different Parliaments. It also assists the IPU, when asked to do so, on subjects within the scope of the Association. ASGP also publishes in a review, *Constitutional and Parliamentary Information*, which appears twice a year in both English as in French.

The role of the Secretary-General varies greatly from parliament to parliament. All over the world it is noticed that there are Secretary-General who belong to political parties and others who are required to exercise strict political neutrality. In a number of parliaments the Secretary-General is elected by the members of parliament, while in others he or she is appointed by the President of Parliament or the Presidium. In some cases the position carries no fixed term of office and this may also mean that the office-holder may be recalled at any time; in other cases the period of office may last several years, sometimes with and sometimes without the possibility of extension. It goes without saying that each of these different forms goes hand in hand with a different understanding of the office, that is to say with more or less autonomy with respect to the serving President, the Presidium and the parliamentary groups.

The agenda for the 146<sup>th</sup> IPU-ASGP was drawn up by the President of ASGP, based upon themes and communications that were proposed at the last meeting in Kigali. The Agenda was not examined by the Executive Committee nor adopted by the ASGP and was therefore subject to change.

### 2.1. ASGP Cultural Programme

On Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2023, for the Secretaries a Cultural Programme was arranged, called '*ASGP Cultural Programme*'. The Author got the opportunity to visit the UNESCO



World Heritage ‘**Pearling Path**’ in the Muharraq City. It was a drive of approximately 15-minute from Manama. Thereafter, we had a lunch at *the House of Coffee restaurant Nasseef*.

### 2.1.1. The Kingdom of Bahrain

According to the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain, it is an independent Islamic Arab State, fully sovereign. The people of Bahrain are part of the Arab Nation and whose territory is part of the great Arab homeland. Its sovereignty may not be assigned or any of its territory abandoned. The regime of the Kingdom of Bahrain is a hereditary constitutional monarchy, which has been handed down by the late Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa to his eldest son Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa, the King of Bahrain. Thenceforward it will pass to his eldest son, one generation after another, unless the King in his lifetime appoints a son other than his eldest son as successor, in accordance with the provisions of the Decree on inheritance stated in the following paragraph. All provisions governing inheritance are regulated by a special Royal Decree that will have a constitutional character, and which can only be amended under the Constitution. The system of Government in the Kingdom of Bahrain is democratic, sovereignty being in the hands of the people, the source of all powers. Sovereignty shall be exercised in the manner stated in the present Constitution. Citizens, both men and women, are entitled to participate in public affairs and enjoy their political rights, including the right to vote and the right to contest for elections, in accordance with the present Constitution and the conditions and principles laid down by law. No citizen can be deprived of his right to vote or to contest for elections except by law. The religion of the State is Islam. The Islamic Shari’a is a main source of legislation. The official language of the State is Arabic.

### 2.1.2. The Kafala System: *Economy of Bahrain*

The Kingdom of Bahrain is a high-income economy, heavily reliant on migrant labour. It operates a sponsorship system of labour, known as the kafala system, whereby migrants must seek permission to change jobs and leave the country. While oil is important to its economy, constituting 18% of its GDP, the service sector, particularly financial services, now accounts for the majority (58%) of economic output. Manufacturing, driven by the production of aluminium and petrochemicals, forms 14% of its economy. Oil and gas are major sources of government revenue, given the absence of personal income taxes. This means changes in oil prices have a significant impact on the Government’s programmes and revenues.

### 2.1.3. The Parliament of Bahrain

The head of the Government since 2020 is the **Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa**, who became Prime Minister following the death of Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, and who also serves as Deputy Commander of the Bahrain Defence Force. The parliament is a bicameral legislature, with the Council of Representatives elected by universal suffrage, and the Consultative Council appointed directly by the King.



The Parliament of Bahrain is bicameral, consisting of the 40 elected members of the Council of Representatives (the lower house) and the 40 royally-appointed members of the Consultative Council (the upper house). Politics of Bahrain has since 2002 taken place in a framework of a constitutional monarchy where the government is appointed by the King of Bahrain, *King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa*. Bahrain is an island in the Persian Gulf; a small land in a continent surrounded by water.

Accordingly, the Parliament consists of two chambers: *the Shura Council and the Council of Representatives*. The two chambers work in harmony forming the basis for legislative and monitoring process in Bahrain.

- **Shura Council:** The Shura Council has played a remarkable role over the years in terms of creating a functioning and healthy democratic environment and mature political action in Bahrain. Accordingly, the Constitution approved of the establishment of the Shura Council to be composed of forty members appointed by Royal Order. The term of membership is four years and members may be reappointed when the term has expired.
- **The Council of Representatives:** This council was created based on the text of the Charter and the Constitution, working hand in hand with the Consultative Shura Council, to consolidate democratic action in the country and popular participation in decision-making. The Council is legislative and monitoring body and has the tools: motion, questions, interrogations, giving vote of no - confidence in a minister, and fact-finding Requests.

3. General theme: *Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies: fighting intolerance*

The concept note for this general debate opens in an alarming tone: *“The world is becoming a more divided and less tolerant and peaceful place.”* Alarming, but also realistic, as many of us can underline from their personal experience. The IPU urges to work towards peaceful coexistence, inclusive societies and fighting intolerance. Laws that contribute to peaceful resolution of conflicts instead of warfare. As law making is one of the key functions of parliaments. Let Parliaments be guardians of the rule of law, deliverer justice and peace, strivers for human rights.

3.1. Bahraini Parliamentary system

Mr. Bunajma, Secretary General of the Bahraini Council of Representatives thanked his Excellency Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the IPU, for his efforts exerted in building bridges of parliamentary cooperation, and exchanging views on all that would consolidate relations and enhance means of joint cooperation between the parliaments of member states, which the Kingdom of Bahrain has been keen on, and with unremitting efforts by both the legislative and executive authorities, to provide the means of success for our meetings, while wishing this association success in achieving its desired goals. Mr. Bunajma is further of the opinion that joint international action on its various stages can



only be achieved through international partnership, concerted efforts, unification, and work to promote and support integration between countries and their peoples.

The meetings of parliament speakers in international forums highlights the important role of legislative institutions in the world, to address issues and support the international community in reaching visions, perceptions, and effective solutions, and within that context, the importance of the meetings of the secretaries general comes to exchange visions, coordinate and organize efforts, and push them forward to develop the performance of the secretariats of the councils to reach the level that everyone desires, which is reflected in the support of the multilateral cooperation path.

Mr. Bunajma shared that since the Kingdom of Bahrain joined the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, there has been a constant keenness to participate in meetings and events, because of their pivotal role and the opportunity it provides, especially with regard to the exchange of information, training, and learning about the experiences and practices of international parliaments, and saw this in its repercussions on the efficiency of employees, developing their capabilities and skills, proposing measures to improve work procedures, and providing legal and technical assistance. Whereas here Bahrain must pay tribute to the positive and effective role played by the Secretariat of the IPU, and its efforts since its inception within the international system of the Union, and the environment it provides to enhance dialogue and cooperation between member parliaments, consultation on various issues of common concern, dealing with data, and highlighting positions on the crucial issues and challenges on the international scene.

### 3.2. Themes: *in the news: Participation of citizens in the work of Parliament*

#### 3.2.1. Introduction

Enhancing the roles of citizens and civil society in public affairs through participatory democracy mechanisms is one of the pillars for building a modern state. The groundwork for participatory democracy as a means for contributing to public debate and decision-making, through the adoption of civic democracy as a pillar of the political system, the consolidation of the functions of civil society in all public policy sessions, and the promotion of a culture of consultation between public authorities and social stakeholders. This has been achieved through several laws, particularly the organic law setting out the requirements and modalities for exercising the right to introduce petitions in the legislative field. This text truly reflects the will to build a democratic society which is based on the values of citizenship and participation, as well as on cooperation and complementarity between the mechanisms of representative democracy and those of participatory democracy, thereby enabling citizens to contribute to the legislative work and influence policy making.





**Theme 1:** In the news, the following communications were presented:

- **Communication 1:** Ms Claressa Surtees, Clerk of the House of Representatives, Parliament of Australia on **'Alteration of the Australian Constitution: Role of the House of Representatives'**

**Theme 2:** In the news, the following communications were presented:

- **Communication 2:** Ms Barbara Dithapo, Clerk of the National Assembly, Botswana on **'Participation of citizens in the work of parliament'**
- **Communication 3:** Mr Kennedy Mugove Chokuda, Clerk of Parliament of Zimbabwe, on **'Participation of Citizens - A Case of the Parliament of Zimbabwe'**
- **Communication 4:** Dr Remco Nehmelman, Secretary General of the Senate of the Netherlands on **'Engaging citizens'**
- **Communication 5:** Ms Sarah Davies, Clerk Assistant, House of Commons, UK, **'The Petitions Committee and the Chamber Engagement Function'**
- **Communication 6:** Mr Kwang-jae Lee, Secretary General of Korean National Assembly, on **'Participation of citizens'**
- **Communication 7:** Mr Sherlock E. Isaacs, Secretary General, Parliament of Guyana on **'Sectoral Committees in the Parliament of Guyana'**
- **Communication 8:** Mr Dhammika Dasanayake, Secretary General of Parliament of Sri Lanka on **'Electing an Executive President by Parliament in extraordinary circumstances'**

3.2.2. *Theme 1: in the news: Alteration of the Australian Constitution: Role of the House of Representatives*

## Introduction

- Australia has a written Constitution which establishes a **bicameral federal parliament** comprised of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The final provisions in the Constitution stipulate requirements for alteration of the Constitution. (Chapter VIII, section 128). While the Parliament may not alone change the Constitution, it nevertheless has a role in initiating a proposed law for altering the Constitution, as prescribed by section 128.

## Passage through the Parliament





- A proposal to alter the Constitution must be initiated, by means of a bill, in either of the two Houses of the Parliament. In most respects the passage of an alteration bill is the same as for an ordinary bill, including that it must pass each House of the Parliament.

### **In principle and detail debates**

- As for ordinary bills, an alteration bill is read a first time on its introduction to the House of Representatives, and an in principle debate takes place before the bill is read a second time. The second reading is followed by debate to consider the alteration bill in detail. This debate is followed by the third reading, after which the alteration bill is sent to the Senate. Section 128 provides for two exceptions in the passage of a bill proposing to alter the Constitution.

### **Requirement for an absolute majority in final voting**

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

### **Alteration bill passed by one House only**

- **A second exception** would apply to overcome disagreement between the two Houses, such that an alteration bill passes one House and the other House rejects or fails to pass the bill, or passes it with an amendment to which the originating House will not agree. In this case, after three months, the originating House may again pass the proposed law, with an absolute majority, with or without any amendment made or agreed to by the other House. If the other House once more rejects or fails to pass the bill to alter the Constitution, or passes it with any amendment to which the originating House will not agree, the Governor-General may submit the proposed law, as last proposed by the originating House, to the electors of Australia at a referendum.

### **Referendum of all electors of Australia**

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



## Voting thresholds for a constitutional referendum

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

## More than 100 years of referendum results

- Since Australian Federation, in 1901, Australians have voted in referendums for 44 separate proposals to alter the Constitution. Thirty-one referendums received neither a favourable majority of electors in a majority of States nor a favourable majority of all electors. Five achieved a favourable majority of all electors but not a favourable majority of electors in a majority of States. **Only eight proposals have succeeded** in securing the majorities necessary to bring about the amendment. The last referendum was conducted in 1999, unsuccessfully. The last successful referendums were achieved in 1977, when four were conducted at one time and three were successful.

## Probable future referendums

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



### 3.2.3. Theme 2: Participation of citizens in the work of Parliament

#### 3.2.3.1. Parliament of Botswana

##### **Introduction**

- In fulfilling the functions of lawmaking and oversight, a parliament represents those that elected them to parliament. For a parliament to maintain legitimacy, it is critical that accountability to voters should take place systematically throughout the parliamentary term, rather than just at election time. It is important that the people should have ample opportunities to provide feedback on the work of the parliament and of individual parliamentarians. The notion therefore that **Parliament** can be thought of as a **public space** where the public can engage with their elected representatives and participate in governance and decision-making processes that affect them is fundamental to participatory democracy.
- According to **the Westminster Foundation for Democracy**, **participatory democracy** needs to be entrenched in representative institutions. Concretely for Parliaments, that means creating spaces for citizens and civil society organizations to voice their opinions. **Public engagement** strengthens parliamentary representation and contributes to better laws and policies. In addition, it helps to ensure the involvement of the public, good governance and accountability by government to the citizens. It promises the progression from a simple representative democracy, where the citizens merely participate in electing their representatives during the elections, to a participatory democracy in which the citizenry are active and involved in decision-making on an ongoing basis. An active citizenry will invariably lead to a more open, dynamic and robust democracy.

##### **Access to parliament by the citizens is imperative in a democracy.**

This is particularly important in facilitating public participation which in large involves:

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

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



## Principles for Public Participation

The public should have a say in decisions about actions that could affect its members' lives

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

## Public participation spectrum

According to the International Association of Public Participation the public participation spectrum describes *the role of the public (or community) in planning and decision-making, and how much influence the community has over planning or decision-making processes*. It identifies **five levels of public participation (or community engagement)**. The further to the right on the Spectrum, the more influence the community has over decisions, and each level can be appropriate depending on the context. In order to achieve public participation and representation, Parliaments must be equipped with the **institutional capacities** to facilitate the function of representation. Benchmarks indicate that parliaments have developed outreach programmes with the objective to facilitate the flow of information in and out of parliament. Ultimately, it has become evident that Parliaments have at their disposal a number of avenues to strengthen their representation role and improve public participation, either by way of physical presence in geographic regions through constituency offices or improved telecommunications and outreach activities.

**Developments in technology** have also contributed to the way parliaments engage and involve citizens and Parliaments ought to take advantage of this growth, core especially given the recent experiences with outbreak of pandemics.

**Effective democratic parliaments** conduct outreach with citizens on an ongoing basis. A parliament may **broadcast its sessions via television or radio**, most now have **websites, and publications designed to help include citizens in the policy process**. Because citizens cannot know how they are being represented if the parliament is opaque and MPs uncommunicative, transparency has an important bearing on the representative function.



## Public Participation in Botswana parliament

### Public Participation Model

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

The **public participation model** is premised on the understanding that in a democratic setup parliament should act as an effective avenue for opening up parliamentary processes to public involvement. In developing this model, referenced and borrowed from **the South African model**, which we have engaged with and had the opportunity to discuss with our neighbouring colleagues. Through this model, the National Assembly of Botswana acknowledges that public engagement strengthens parliamentary representation and contributes to better laws and policies. In addition, it helps to ensure the involvement of the public, good governance and accountability by government to the citizens.

### Mission, Vision and Values

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

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

Within its strategic framework (2016-2023), Parliament also commits promoting public engagement and participation to strengthen Parliament and enhance accountable governance in Botswana. The public participation model for the NAB thus takes into account parliament’s role as the representatives of the people and consequently making decisions on their behalf. Given that parliamentary representatives generally go back to their voters each general election, it therefor makes great sense for parliament to remain in touch with the people it represents on an ongoing basis so that it better reflects the



interests and wishes of the electorate. The laws that it enacts and the oversight that it carries out will be more reflective of society if it were to engage with and involve the public throughout its term. Public participation therefore requires that there is direct involvement of the public in the work of parliament, and that there is open discussion between the public and their parliamentary representatives and decision-makers.

**The purpose of this model is:**

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

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

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

## **Public Participation Mechanisms and Tools**

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

### **Case Study 1 - Monitoring Service Delivery**

#### **The Community Scorecard**

The Community Score Card (CSC) is a participatory, community based monitoring and evaluation tool that enables citizens to assess the quality of public services and interact with services providers to express their concerns. It is a community based monitoring tool that is a hybrid of the techniques of social audit, community monitoring and citizen report





cards. The CSC is an instrument used to extract social and public accountability and responsiveness from service providers. It is used to inform community members about available services and their entitlements and to solicit their opinions about the accessibility and quality of these services. By providing an opportunity for direct dialogue between service providers and the community, the CSC process empowers the public to voice their opinion and demand improved service delivery. The ultimate goal of the CSC is to influence the quality, efficiency and accountability with which services are provided.

A scorecard approach provides:

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

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

**A scorecard approach** provides communities and service providers with data which they can use to measure impact over time and use to advocate for measures to improve service delivery from governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders. The National Assembly of Botswana rolled out this initiative in 7 of the 12 Districts from June to July, 2022, through five Portfolio Committees of; Health, HIV & AIDS; Education and Skills Development; Finance, Trade and Economic Development; Agriculture, Lands and Housing; and Local Governance and Social Welfare.

## **Objectives**

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





Parliament further seeks:

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

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

## Case Study 2 - Leveraging ICTs

### Botswana Speaks - Digital Kgotla

Botswana, has been lauded as a shining beacon for Democracy in Africa, through her adherence to the Rule of Law, peace and stability. Since independence in 1966, Botswana has held free and fair elections. The country's rich history, culture, and sound institutions have greatly influenced its successful milestones which have translated in to economic development. Consultation or Therisanyo as it is widely understood has for centuries and beyond played a vital role in the everyday undertakings of every unit of society in Botswana. This extends from the family unit to the highest being the Nation. Consultation is a custom globally, done so as to ensure smooth facilitation of change, developments, multi-lateral and bilateral agreements to be put in to effect. Therefore, Botswana place great importance and respect on Morero, which is when consultations take effect. The Kgotla remains the platform and place where communities converge for consultations as is the tradition of the land. This is the cornerstone of Botswana's democracy where the principles of freedom of speech, participation or mmualebe in Setswana have been enshrined from time immemorial. These tenets have permeated and influenced Botswana's transition into a multi-party democracy, where consultations continue to form the basis for National Development planning, community and Nation building.

Seeking to improve on this tried and tested method of facilitating dialogue between citizens and leadership, it was found that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can be used to enhance citizen participation on policy dialogue and further strengthen democracy in Botswana, hence the birth of Botswana Speaks.



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

Botswana Speaks was successfully piloted in the **four constituencies** of **Nata/Gweta, Maun West, Boteti North, and South East** from April 2013 to March 2014. The Botswana Speaks Project pilot phase was a partnership project between the Parliament of Botswana, eGovlab (University of Stockholm), Gov2u (Non-Governmental Organisation based in Sweden) and the Swedish Trade Council. Following the successful piloting, the Pilot phase report was adopted by the 10th parliament and recommended for a rollout to all constituencies during NDP 11. Botswana Speaks is therefore about Voice and leaving nobody behind while enhancing and bridging the gap between our traditional consultation systems (Kgotla meetings) leveraging on new technologies.

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

#### **It has two components built in;**

1. *uSpeak*-for constituents to submit issues, opinions pertaining to their constituency. *uSpeak* will also enable constituents to be in touch with their MP's and or request information from them.
2. *Speak4Yourself* -enables constituents to discuss, vote on (polls), make their position known about issues and legislation before Parliament. This will empower constituents to have more of a say and role with regard to policy making and motions tabled by their respective MP's at Parliament.

#### **The Need for Botswana Speaks**

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

#### **What Botswana Speaks will do**

1. *Increase citizen participation in the democratic process*
2. *Improve communication between elected representatives and citizens*
3. *Reduce digital divide between rural and urban communities*
4. *Harness opportunities presented by the more than 100% mobile penetration in Botswana*
5. *Increase uptake and use of Information Communication Technologies (ICT's) in Botswana.*



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

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

### **Botswana Speaks is FREE**

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

### **SMS based platform**

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

### **Botswana Speaks Constituency Officers**

Each of the 57 Parliament constituency offices across Botswana has a dedicated Botswana Speaks officer based at each office. The officers are extensively trained on Parliament functions and on using the Botswana Speaks platform and are ready to address any queries should they arise and ensure that every Motswana has access to the platform irrespective of their age, gender, religion and or political affiliation. The programme is also now integrated into other national ICT programmes most especially the village connectivity programme which seeks to connect all villages to broadband internet connection. Access to internet in public areas free of charge also enables connectivity to Botswana Speaks through the Smart Botswana initiative of availing Government services online. In that regard it is very evident that even at Executive level, public access and meaningful remains a priority as a catalyst for national development.

### **Make your voice heard!**

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

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



As Parliament of Botswana, we strive for the progression from a simple representative democracy, where the citizens don't just merely participate in electing their representatives during the elections, to a participatory democracy in which the citizenry are active and involved in decision-making on an ongoing basis.

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

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

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

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

### **Conclusions**

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



- It is **this dialogue** that is so important to the work of an MP and the parliament. Citizens must be provided with access to information about what is happening in the parliament and the positions being taken by their MP. In return, citizens must have venues for providing their opinions and inputs into the work of the parliament. In a **functioning democracy citizens** have knowledge and opinions about various draft laws under consideration. They also have access to information about how the government is implementing laws and spending their tax monies. This information must be used to ensure proper oversight of the Executive branch of government.

#### 3.2.4. Parliament of Zimbabwe

Chokuda started by quoting a statement done by Ben-Zeev and Waterhouse (2012), who observed, and I believe, rightly so that *“A ‘People’s Parliament’ requires an institution that prioritises and seeks active engagement with the public, and that is receptive and responsive to the needs of the people.”* This laudable statement forms the import of my communication, which quintessentially speaks to how the Parliament of Zimbabwe has moved towards enhancing the participation of citizens in the work of Parliament.

Reflective of the infectious aspiration espoused by Ben-Zeev and Waterhouse (2012), the Constitution of Zimbabwe gives credence to the participation of citizens in Parliament. Section 141 of the Constitution read together with Standing Order 191 is emphatic in its declaration that *“Parliament must facilitate public involvement in its legislative and other processes and in the processes of its Committees.”* Dove-tailing Section 141, Section 149 of the Constitution read together with Standing Order 195 accords every citizen and permanent resident of Zimbabwe, the right to petition Parliament to consider any matter within its authority, including the enactment, amendment or repeal of any legislation. Additionally, these cardinal provisions are reinforced in our Parliament’s Institutional Strategic Plan (2018-2023), which unequivocally articulates the modus operandi towards the attainment of the Constitutional mandate of *“protecting the Constitution and promoting democratic governance in Zimbabwe.”* It is therefore axiomatic that the robust Constitutional and other provisions are only as effective only when they are implemented. To that end, the Parliament of Zimbabwe adopted a three pronged model, which acts a conduit through which public participation in Parliament can be enhanced.

#### **Three key pillars: Information and Education, Consultation and Involvement as well as Feedback**

The model is anchored on three key pillars of Information and Education, Consultation and Involvement as well as Feedback.

- *Under the **Information and Education** pillar, our Parliament cast its gaze towards enhancing access to information, which we believe is the cornerstone for effective citizen participation in Parliament. Through the Speaker’s Outreach Program, which has largely targeted higher and tertiary education institutions in Zimbabwe, Parliament of Zimbabwe has managed to establish linkages between the legislature and the academia which laid the foundation for evidence-informed policy making. Further, over the past few years, our*





Parliament has taken steps to adequately capacitate the Public Relations Department, the hub of information dissemination in Parliament. Moreover, observing that the modern environment is inundated with misinformation and disinformation including misconceptions about the operations of Parliament, our Parliament embarked on the development of a robust Communication Strategy and Language Policy. The Communication strategy establishes an efficient and effective communication infrastructure with both internal and external stakeholders, including citizens, which is critical to meeting our constitutional obligations. The Language Policy, on the other hand, envisages that all the sixteen (16) recognised languages in Zimbabwe are utilised in the dissemination of information. It is hoped that this strategy will be of importance in countering fake news and disinformation while simultaneously enhancing the effective and efficient participation of the citizens in Parliament. The Parliament of Zimbabwe has taken it upon itself to inform the general public on the petition's procedure in response to the common realisation that petitions submitted before Parliament were generally inadmissible mostly due to technicalities. In this regard, a petition procedure has been developed, and the legal services has set up a booth at every exhibition to inform the public about the petition processes. Additionally, the vibrant Research Department has been critical in the production of content and research products such as policy briefs, analysis of budget statements, bills, protocols and agreements – all of which work to educate the citizens and assist them to effectively participate in the activities of Parliament and its Committees. To add on, Parliament of Zimbabwe has increasingly participated in various exhibition shows such as the Zimbabwe Agricultural Show (ZAS), the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF) and other provincial exhibition shows. These platforms have been used to spread information about Parliament, which, in the grand scheme will enhance citizen participation. Parliament of Zimbabwe, through the Public Relations Department has hosted various schools and organisations and has given them a tour of the Parliament Building as a way of opening Parliament to the citizens. A robust interactive website has been critical in disseminating information to the public. Significant investments have been made over the years to ensure that Members and the general public have access to sufficient and timely content. Participation and regular content updates on various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have proven to be very effective in increasing our reach and providing citizens with relevant and accurate information. The COVID requirements taught us to think outside the box, which led to investments in these platforms.

- Turning to the **Consultation and Involvement** pillar, which is primarily anchored on Section 141 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and Standing Order 191, Parliament of Zimbabwe has formulated and implemented a raft of interventions. Among these includes the use of public hearings for bills, petitions and other issues national interest. More so, bearing in mind that the world has gone digital and necessitated by the exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic, our Parliament has also adopted virtual public hearings which are carried out through the Zoom platform. The hearings have also been taken to the radio stations as a way of widening the reach especially for people in the hard-to-reach areas. Additionally, Members of Parliament, as the elected representatives of the people have increasingly utilised the question time platform during the Wednesday Parliament plenary sessions to highlight issues of importance in their respective constituencies. Through motions, Members of Parliament have been vociferous in playing their representative role



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

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

### **Faced Challenges.**

- The use of the aforementioned tactics has not been without its challenges.
  - o Their efforts to properly involve the public in our processes and procedures are nevertheless hindered by resource limitations. To enable the successful implementation of these initiatives, both human and financial resources are important.
  - o Their Twitter handle was hacked twice in 2022 as a result of our frequent use of social media tools, making them vulnerable to cyberattacks.
  - o They extended our participation in the social media sphere, misinformation, and disinformation activities against our content intensified. Without appropriate countermeasures, misinformation and disinformation have a high potential to undermine efforts made to engage the public. Additionally, while we urged our Presiding Officers and Members to use social media as a way to interact with the public, we learned that this endeavor had a cost as fraudulent accounts were quickly formed. Unexpectedly, some of the fake accounts have been publishing helpful content. However, the need to maintain the credibility of the institution and to ensure that only authorised content is made available to the public demands that we take control and own the distribution channels at our disposal. Moving ahead, preparations are being made to hire a specialised officer to handle cyber threats. We





*have also enlisted the aid of our legal staff in relation to inadmissible petitions in order to provide details on the expected format and content.*

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

### 3.2.5. Senat of the Netherlands

Nehmelman started by saying that participation of citizens has been at the heart of our democracies since the words *demos* and *kratos* were first used by the ancient Greeks. Looking at the word, meaning ‘people rule’, to realize that our democracies are built on participation by citizens. Without them there would be no democracy.

Though this may seem a simplification of reality, therefore he does not think that it is necessary that we realize this before we continue our exchange of views on the topic. Of course, the Netherlands are now dealing with representative democracies, in which our parliaments are elected by the people. With that mandate, parliamentarians can go forward with their work. In recent years, we – in the Netherlands – have seen that voter turnout has declined and more and more people have started to express that they do not feel represented by their elected representatives, on all levels: local, regional, national and European.

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

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



the government. Which again led to more people losing their faith in their representatives. A vicious circle. A topic that I do feel is worthwhile exploring is the call for lowering voting age. In the Netherlands the voting age is 18, and many believe that by changing it to 16 will benefit the involvement of people, and the youth especially. Also, young people have a different perspective on issues such as climate change and migration. Perspectives that are not taken into account at the moment, at least when it comes to voter participation on which our parliament is based.

Although there are official advisory reports to the Dutch government to lower the age to 16, the government has thus far rejected these proposals, because on the one hand it means constitutional change, a thorough process which cannot be undertaken lightly, and on the other hand it is suggested by the government that the brains of young people are not fully grown and ready to assume such a responsibility. I know that several countries have lowered the voting age in recent years, and I look forward to hearing from you what your experiences are. And, whether this had had a positive effect on voter turnout and citizens, especially young citizens, engagement.

In conclusion, whether citizens engagement is the only way forward. Hesitant whether participation projects are the solution to citizens unrest and political fragmentation, and hesitant because of what this will mean for our parliaments. The question are:

- *what is parliaments' role in the call for new democracy?*
- Is citizens participation the future of our parliamentary democracy?
- And if yes, how can we best organize this with respect for parliamentary democracy? These are my questions to you this afternoon.

He end by saying that he does not yet have the answers, and is looking forward to discuss.

### 3.2.6. United Kingdom

#### **Petitioning in the UK House of Commons: a history and an e-revolution**

Petitioning has been part of the UK Parliament for hundreds of years. There are records of petitions from the fourteenth century, while the right of the public to petition was agreed by the Commons by resolution in 1669.

In the 19th century the Chartists presented a petition with 3.5 million signatures; the signature sheets had to be hand sewn together to create a single roll of paper that weighed over 300kg. It was carried in a large decorated box to Parliament by relays of building workers through London, along with a procession of music and flags, attracting huge crowds who watched it be delivered. When entering the House of Commons it was so big that it got stuck trying to get through the House of Commons door. After attempts to dismantle the doorframe failed, the petition was disassembled and the sheets heaped onto the floor of the House. Here they towered above the clerks' table on which, in theory, the petition was supposed to be laid. Image: Engraving showing the Chartist petition arriving at Parliament. The biggest public petition to date (against ambulance service cuts) was presented in 1990 and had 4.5 million signatures.



## E-petitions

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

### E-petitions and the work of the Petitions Committee

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

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

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

### How e-petitions relate to the Petitions Committee

The Petitions Committee has all the same powers as a standard House of Commons departmental Committee. It can also refer petitions to her Committees, and link relevant petitions to items on the Commons Order paper. Uniquely, the Committee also has the power to schedule debates on petitions in Westminster Hall, the House's second debating Chamber. These are on neutral motions. Petitions receiving more than 100,000 signatures are automatically considered by the Committee for a debate, but petitions with fewer signatures can be debated too. These are often among the most watched or read debates in Parliament.



## **Public engagement and petitions**

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

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

## **Inquiry work**

The Committee inquired in 2015 into support and funding for treatment of brain tumours. Following an initial Government response to a petition on the subject, which the Committee felt insufficient, the Committee launched an inquiry. It received over 1,000 personal submissions and held events to meet with contributors. It produced a report based heavily on this personal testimony, ahead of a debate in Westminster Hall. As a result of the combination of engagement and proceedings, the Government agreed to establish a working group on the subject, which included a representative of the petitioners. In the longer term, this led to an increase in funding for brain tumour treatment, and an improved mechanism for allocating funding to research.

## **Bringing in new voices to an existing debate**

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

## **Changing the conversation**

The Petitions Committee's engagement has also changed the way in which issues are debated in Parliament. For example, it received a petition (started and signed by a large number of young people) about reducing the school week so that children didn't have to go to school on a Friday. This petition could have been dismissed as children being 'lazy' and just wanting more time off. However, after sending a survey to everyone who signed the petition, the public engagement highlighted the serious reasons behind it: the mental health of school children, children wanting more time to spend with families; and wanting



more time to do extracurricular activities such as sport or other creative interests that they had. The summary of the survey was sent to all MPs and the Minister who responded to the debate.

## Summary

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

### 3.2.7. Parliament of Korea

The development of information and communication technology and AI is triggering great changes in the way people participate in politics. With **data integration** and **real-time processing**, as well as **smoother interactive communication**, citizens are now directly involved in the **policy process**. Technology is compensating for the limitations of the existing representative system caused by information asymmetry and one-way communication. Various efforts of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea to improve people's participation in politics using technology.

- They built a **National Strategy and Policy Big Data Platform**. The “National Strategy and Policy Big Data Platform” is a data platform that integrates important policy data for the country and its people and converts it for machine learning. We aim to create new values through data integration, establish reasonable policy agenda, and identify potential policy demands.  
Korea also planned to collaborate with the government, public institutions and the private sector in this process. It will allow the National Assembly to come up with high-quality policies through data integration and sharing and to re-establish itself as an institution that solves problems in line with the needs of the people.
- The Policy Seminar Real-time Broadcasting System. Considering that policy seminar is one of the main legislative activities of the National Assembly members, they are building a system that relays policy seminars to the public in real time.
- They install digital video recording and sound equipment and monitors in the conference room of the National Assembly Members' Office Building and establish a network so that each member's office can easily record their own policy seminars and transmit them on YouTube. Starting with a small-scale pilot project in 2022, we are in the process of installing new equipment in 13 conference rooms this year.
- Introduction of **the real-time broadcasting system** will not only enhance public access to legislative activities, but also enable two-way communication between the public and the National Assembly members by incorporating interactive communication technologies such as online chatting. In addition, the preservation





of policy seminar videos on a separate web site will make it easy for everyone to find and use them.

- Lastly, introduction of the 'Live Subtitling System with AI Speech Recognition'. It has been developed and established in accordance with the 「National Assembly Act, which stipulates measures for smooth provision of information to the disabled. The system is meaningful in that it is the world's first live subtitling service using AI speech recognition for National Assembly meetings.

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

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

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

### 3.2.8. Parliament of Guyana

#### **Introduction**

The results of the 1997 General and Regional Elections in Guyana were disputed and created a great disturbance which caused the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Leaders enjoined on the Leaders of the two main political parties in Guyana to find a solution to resolve the disturbance. The two Political Leaders agreed to a shared Governance System. To this end, the Leaders of the two main political parties at that time, Mrs. Janet Jagan of the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) and Mr. Desmond Hoyte of the People's National Congress (PNC), entered into two agreements: the Herdmanston Accord on January 17, 1998; and the St. Lucia Statement on July 2, 1998.

#### **Constitutional Reform Commission**

The agreement and the statement were efforts to resolve the situation and to find a way to settle the socio-political problem in Guyana. Additionally, the Leaders embarked on a dialogue which paved the way for Constitutional Reform and enabling recommendations for the proper functioning of the National Assembly to be made. A Constitutional Reform Commission was established and, in order to allow the Opposition to participate more meaningfully in the governance of the country, recommended the establishment of **four**





**Sectoral Committees** to ensure that the Government is kept transparent and accountable. The four Sectoral Committees are:

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

### **Background of the Sectoral Committees**

The idea of establishing the Sectoral Committees:

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

### **Roles of Sectoral Committees**

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

### **Functions of Sectoral Committees**

These four Sectoral Committees have the authority to:

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



The National Assembly may request a Sectoral Committee **to enquire into** and report on any aspect of the policy or administration of the Government within its terms of reference. Within **sixty days** of the presentation of a report from a Sectoral Committee, the Government shall, upon the request of the Committee, **table a comprehensive response thereto** **Sectoral Committees report to the National Assembly from time to time but** can also report on the progress of their work for the previous year and its work programme for the ensuing year. Reports of the Committees remain confidential until they are presented to the National Assembly.

### **Areas of Scrutiny of Sectoral Committees**

The Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources (PSCNR)

Some of the areas of scrutiny of this Committee are:

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

The Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services (PSCES)

Some of the areas of scrutiny of this Committee are:

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

The Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations (PSCFR)

Some of the areas of scrutiny of this Committee are:

- *Foreign trade,*
- *International organisations,*
- *CARICOM,*
- *Technical cooperation/developing countries,*
- *Foreign aid,*
- *Diplomatic relations,*



- *Multilateral relations,*
- *Cabinet matters,*
- *Organisation of Islamic Conferences,*
- *National security,*
- *The Commonwealth*

### Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services (PSCSS)

Some of the areas of scrutiny of this Committee are:

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

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

### Composition and Structure of the Sectoral Committees

Membership of Sectoral Committees.

- *Each Committee consists of seven (7) Members, four (4) representing the Government and three (3) representing the Opposition.*
- *The Government and Opposition are entitled to elect one alternate Member for each Sectoral Committee. The composition provides the Committees with an ideal atmosphere for discussions and the exchange of views.*

Chairmanship of Sectoral Committees.

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



### 3.2.9. Parliament of Shri Lanka

#### **Sri Lankan Constitution**

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

#### **President Gotabaya Rajapakse**

President Gotabaya Rajapakse was elected as the 8th Executive President of Sri Lanka on the 18th November 2019, with an overwhelming majority, succeeding Maithripala Sirisena who was the 7th Executive President of Sri Lanka. Within a short time after elections, Sri Lanka together with many other countries of the world had to face severe repercussions with the onset of the covid -19 pandemic. In combination with a certain degree of economic mismanagement and balance of payments issues, a major economic and debt crisis emerged which led to high inflation, shortage of fuel and cooking gas, major surge in cost of living and power outages. In this background, a mass movement supported by some opposition parties, calling themselves 'Aragalaya' or 'Struggle' took to streets calling for the resignation of Hon. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the incumbent President and his Government. In July 2022, the protesters stormed the President's House and the President's Office in Colombo, forcing the President to resign from office on the 14th of July 2022, by a letter addressed to the Speaker. Consequent to the resignation of Hon. Gotabaya Rajapaksa from office of the President, the Parliament elected the Hon. Ranil Wickremasinghe as the 9th President of Sri Lanka on the 20th July, 2022 for the balance period of Presidency of the Hon. Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

#### **The Election of the President**

The incumbent President Hon. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, by a letter dated 14th July, 2022 addressed to the Speaker, **resigned from** the Office of the President. The Speaker summoned a Party Leaders meeting immediately thereafter and informed the Party Leaders the process of electing a President for the balance period of the Presidency of the Hon. Gotabaya Rajapaksa in keeping with the provisions of Article 40 of the Constitution and the 'Election of President Special Provisions Act No. 02 of 1981'. At this meeting, the



Speaker gave an undertaking to the Party Leaders that the election process will take place, adhering to the highest norms of transparent and accountable procedures, as envisaged in the Constitution. He also appealed to the Political Leaders, Government Officials, Security Forces and the People to extend their fullest cooperation at this critical hour. The Speaker particularly, appealed to the people to allow their Members of Parliament to attend Parliament without any obstacles to participate in the process of electing a new President and promised to complete the task within a period 7 days. The Party Leaders were informed that the Parliament will be summoned to meet on the 16th of July at 10 am, to make the formal announcement on the resignation of the President and to inform the date for accepting of nominations.

The Constitution provides that, in the event of a vacancy in the office of the President, prior to the expiration of his term, the Parliament shall elect as President, one of its Members who is qualified to be elected to the office of President. Any person so succeeding to the office of the President, shall hold office only for the unexpired period of the term of office of the President vacating office. The Constitution further provides that, such election will be held soon as possible after and in no case later than one month. The particular Article goes on to say that the election shall be by secret ballot and by an absolute majority of the votes cast in accordance with the procedure as Parliament may by law provide. In compliance of the above legal requirements, particularly the Presidential Elections (Special Provisions ) Act No. 2 of 1981 the necessary steps were adopted. The Law provides that the **occurrence of the vacancy** will operate as summoning of the Parliament to meet within three days. **The Law obligates the Secretary General to issue** a Gazette notification to summon the Parliament to inform the Parliament that a vacancy has arisen in the Office of the President and to announce the date on which the nominations will be received for the election of the President.

### **The Conduct of the Election**

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

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

- *That any Member of Parliament who intend to propose another Member as a candidate for the election of the President must obtain his consent to hold that post in writing and the said letter shall be handed over to the Secretary General at the time the name is proposed,*



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

As informed by the Secretary General of Parliament, the Parliament met on the 19th of July and three names of Members of Parliament were proposed and were duly seconded by three other Members of the House. Thereupon the Parliament resolved to meet again on the 20th July, 2022 to conduct the election for the electing of the President. The Secretary General and his team of officials had to make all preparations to conduct the secret ballot within a time span of 24 hours, having printed the necessary ballot papers and making arrangements to facilitate the ballot within the Chambers of the Parliament. All preparations were done and a rehearsal was also carried out addressing all possible eventualities. The ballot could involve counting several rounds to ascertain which candidate has secured the absolute majority after having eliminated the candidate who would have got the least number of votes. Extra sets of ballot papers were also printed in different colours to face any situation where a vote has to be cancelled and a new poll has to be conducted. Separate boxes were prepared with numbers representing the three candidates being fixed on them, to facilitate the counting of the ballots. Score sheets were printed to enable officers to maintain the records, including the total number of ballots cast, the number of valid votes polled and the number of spoilt votes and the number each candidate received and the absolute majority required. As resolved, the Parliament met on the 20th of July 2022 to elect the President for the balance period of the presidency of the former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. At the commencement of the sittings the Secretary General explained to the Members of the Parliament, the rules pertaining to the conduct of the elections;

- *At the very inception, the quorum bell will be rung for five minutes informing the Members of Parliament that the election will take place in the Chamber shortly,*
- *The empty ballot box will be shown to all Members before the commencement of the poll and sealed in their presence.*
- *For the purpose of casting their vote, the names of the Members will be called in the order they are placed in the division list, commencing with the Speaker being called to vote first.*
- *The Secretary General will place his initials on the reverse side of each ballot paper at the time they are handed over to the Member.*
- *If a Member inadvertently spoils a ballot paper, he can request for a new ballot paper before he puts it in the box and the Secretary General can issue a new ballot paper after having cancelled the previous ballot paper.*
- *The Members have to mark the ballot papers in the consoles provided for this purpose but will not be allowed to photograph the marked ballot paper.*





- *The Members who are absent when their name is called will be called again after all other names are called at the end.*
- *Each Candidate by himself or by appointing another Member can observe the counting of the ballots at the table.*
- *By law, Members are required to mark the ballot paper with the no 1 and they could also express a second preference by also inserting no 2 in front of the name of a candidate. The law specifically provides that ballot papers which are not marked with no 1 are invalid.*
- *If a Member inserts any signature or other sign on the ballot paper, the law stipulates that the respective ballot paper should be treated as an invalid ballot.*
- *A ballot paper without the initials of the Secretary General on the reverse side is also invalid.*
- *The Members were also told that since the Constitution mandates a secret ballot, they should desist from displaying the ballot paper to the House.*

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

### 5.3. Theme 3: Gender inequality in parliaments: what are the solutions?

#### 5.3.1. Outline

With regards to this topic, a general debate was organized in which was dealt regarding Gender inequality in parliament, with the special question: *what are the solutions?*. The moderator was M. José Pedro MONTERO, secretary general of the Senate of Uruguay. Groups were asked to deliberate regarding the following questions, notably:

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

#### 5.3.2. Parliament of Poland

In Poland equality between women and men is one of the fundamental principles of the legal order. The Constitution of the Republic of Poland grants men and women equal rights in all civil spheres, namely in family, political, social and economic life. Poland's outstanding achievement for gender equality is **granting women the right to vote as early as 1918**, shortly after the independent state had been restored. Thus, **Poland became a leader** in this respect, ahead of many countries such as the United Kingdom, Spain, Belgium, France, Italy and Switzerland. Moreover, unlike the long-standing struggle for the emancipation of women's groups in other countries, the **equalisation of voting rights between Polish women and men did not encounter significant protests** in our country. Public approval for such a solution resulted from recognition of women's extensive participation in the political conspiracy during the partition period and the merits incurred in the struggle for Poland's independence during and immediately after the First World War.



Today, in terms of equal participation of women in parliament, **Poland is ahead of other countries, especially in the Central and Eastern European regions**. Since 2011, the so-called "quotas" have been in force in the Electoral Code, which stipulates that electoral lists must include a minimum of 35% of representatives of a gender other than the dominant one. Practice looks even more promising, as women have consistently accounted for at least **42% of candidates in parliamentary elections** since 2011. Moreover, women accounted for a record high proportion of candidates - 47% in the 2019 European Parliament elections.

In the Sejm of the current ninth term, **women account for 28.3% of all parliamentarians**. There are 130 women out of a total of 460 MPs on the parliamentary benches, and **54 women represent the ruling party** in the Sejm, which amounts to 23.7% of all parliamentarians of this political option. The **representation of women in the Lower Chamber's praesidium** is also significant. Currently, the Marshal of the Sejm is Elżbieta Witek, and the Deputy Marshals of the Sejm are Małgorzata Gosiewska and Małgorzata Kidawa-Błońska. Consequently, there is gender parity in the Presidium of the current Sejm (three women and three men). In previous terms of office, women have also stood at the head of the Parliament. In the 2011-2015 term, two women served as Marshals of Poland's experience shows that **habits and customs**, not a legal barrier, constitute **the most common reason for women's absence** from politics. Although women make up 52% of Poland's total population, they are more likely to find themselves working closer to their families or in jobs that are not necessarily related to politics. The above stems from the belief that politics requires fierce competition, uncompromisingness and brutality, as qualities quite stereotypically attributed to men. Meanwhile, women, as they often declare, enter politics to soften its image and to introduce more competencies associated with conciliation, tolerance and dialogue.

The positive note is, however, that both the role and women's independence in public life are steadily increasing, which is linked to two fundamental factors. The first is the **participation of women in the public and social life** of our country. It manifests itself, for example, in **the number of women in the highest state positions** - Prime Minister, Marshal of the Sejm, the Ombudsperson or president of the highest courts. **Women's participation can also be seen in Polish entrepreneurship**, as confirmed by "Forbes" magazine research or the regular "Women in Business" survey. According to statistics, while on average, 22% of people in senior managerial positions are women worldwide, **in Poland, this figure is as high as 34%. It is worth emphasising that the result is better than the EU average**. The Sejm. Currently, in the Sejm, women head seven parliamentary committees, and 42 female MPs are vice-chairpersons of committees. Furthermore, the **Women's Parliamentary Group**, which brings together women MPs fighting for women's rights from all political options, **has been active in the Sejm for many years** (in the current Sejm, the Women's Group has 87 members).



### 5.3.3. Parliament of Vietnam

Gender equality is of great significance, as it is one of the striving goals of countries around the world towards the promotion of a progressive, equal and sustainable society, and is a top concern at regional and international parliamentary fora. In the process of policy-making, parliaments need to promote their role in addressing inequality, and at the same time, they must really become legislative bodies that respect and represent gender equality.

In Vietnam, promoting gender equality and women's rights is a consistent policy of their Party and State, and it is enshrined in the Constitution and guaranteed in practice. The National Assembly of Viet Nam has passed many legal documents (such as the Constitution, the Law on Gender Equality, the Law on Elections of National Assembly Deputies and People's Council deputies, etc.) to protect and promote women's empowerment and encourage women's participation in economic - political - social affairs. During the review and adoption of laws, it is necessary to put in place a gender impact assessment for each policy. In addition, **the Standing Committee of the National Assembly of Vietnam** has given instructions to strengthen training, capacity building for female candidates participating in election campaigns as well as female National Assembly deputies once they are elected; strengthen communication and raise awareness for voters and people about the role of women participating in the National Assembly.

#### **Progressive outcomes on gender equality**

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

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

#### **View to further advancing gender equality**

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



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

## 6.0. Theme 4: online voting system in Spain and discussion on MPs and conflict of interest

### 6.1. The Spanish Senate: *online voting in the system*

#### **Introduction**

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

Article 79 of the Spanish Constitution establishes the general rules for voting in the Chambers. Section 3 – the relevant section for the purposes of this communication – provides that “*the vote of Senators and Deputies is personal and may not be delegated.*” This precept is repeated verbatim in Section 92.5 of the Senate Standing Orders. The requirement for the vote to be personal implies that it is the parliamentarian that decides how he/she votes. And he/she can do so freely. In parliaments where political groups have a rigid structure, parliamentary discipline is the instrument used to help maintain a homogenous political approach within them. Various measures are used to ensure that voting instructions are followed, such as indicating the intended vote or internal political group fines for those who vote differently. However, each parliamentarian ultimately decides what he/she votes for. In addition, personal voting means that it cannot be cast by another person.

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



specifying how to vote, it would have to be done before the deliberation, breaking the logic of parliamentarianism. Obviously, this description corresponds more to an ideal scenario than the practical reality of our assemblies. An ideal scenario that is found in the roots of the idea that each parliamentarian represents the people and that the decisions taken in parliament are made after deliberation, in which the rational of the discussions could convince the other parliamentarians of one's own views. Maybe a parliament like this has never existed. In most cases, voting intentions are decided before the start of debates. Changes of opinion following the debates are rare, and if they do occur, they most often affect the vote of all members of the political group. It is very rare for parliamentarians to break party line with their vote.

But we should not lose sight of **these theoretical pillars** which are inherent to the essence of parliamentarism and are relevant to what follows.

### **Right and duty of voting**

The Senate Standing Orders make voting a right and duty of senators. In addition, the Spanish Constitutional Court declared that the fundamental right of holding parliamentary office (as established by Article 23.2 of the Spanish Constitution) includes, among other rights, the right to vote. However, the exercise of this right to vote (and fulfilment of the duty to do so) may be hindered or prevented for different reasons.

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

#### **Such circumstances include:**

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

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

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





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

### **Remote voting in the Spanish Senate**

In the Spanish Senate system, the rules governing remote voting include - as we shall see - some of these modalities in which different circumstances make it difficult or impossible to vote in person. As we have seen, it is based on the constitutional prohibition of delegation and also the difficulty of using other techniques, typically used in some parliaments - such as temporary substitution or pairing -, but alien to the Spanish parliamentary tradition and difficult to apply, especially the latter, where political representation is highly fragmented, as is currently the case in Spain. The aim is therefore to address such circumstances through the regulation and use of remote voting. It should be noted that remote voting is only used in plenary sessions in the Senate. It is not specified in the Committee as senators may substitute each other. It assumes that the parliamentarian voting remotely is in a position to follow the session and the debates via streaming and mobile devices.

### **The first phase of remote voting: 2013**

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

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

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



## **Second phase of remote voting: the pandemic (2020)**

All kinds of solutions were required to ensure that the Senate, like all parliaments, could continue to function during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among them was the political agreement to limit the physical presence of senators in the chamber to slow the spread of the virus as much as possible. This was a political agreement and not legally binding so as to respect each senator's right of attendance. This limitation meant that it was not possible to use the in person electronic voting system. The Senate agreed (by means of a Supplementary Rule to the Standing Orders of 9 June 2020, issued by the Speaker) to establish remote voting for all senators on a mandatory basis, including those present in person. It was considered necessary to prioritise equal voting conditions for all senators. The system of voting in person was deactivated. Remote voting was used for all voting, regardless of the item on the agenda. A sufficient period of time was allowed for voting to ensure (1) that the subject of the vote was known, (2) that the vote was cast, (3) that it was received, (4) that it was counted and (5) that any technical problems arising from the voting process could be resolved.

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

The Supplementary Rule became obsolete in October 2021 when all senators returned in person. However, a new Supplementary Rule was passed on 30 November 2021 with the sixth wave of the pandemic (Omicron) (which was also applied in any plenary sessions where there were failures in the in-person voting system). This also allowed for ballot voting to elect members of bodies appointed by the Senate (such as the Board of Directors of the Public Radio and Television Corporation).

## **The third (and current) phase of remote voting: 2022**

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

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



In addition to the above, the new Article 92 (4) of the Standing Orders provides as follows:

*“In extraordinary events, such as catastrophes, disasters, health crises, suspension of essential public services for the community, as well as in those extraordinary events in which the normal parliamentary activity may not be held in the Senate Palace, or in which the in-person electronic vote procedure may not be used, the Speaker, in agreement with the Board of Spokespersons, may resolve that all senators cast their vote by the remote electronic procedure.”*

Provision is made in the Standing Orders for cases such as those which gave rise to the abovementioned Supplementary Rules.

### **Basic technical aspects of the system.**

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

When remote voting opens, the senator must select “yes”, “no” or “abstain” for each of the matters put to vote. They can review the options and when they want to cast their vote, they accept the selection and enter the OTR code received on their mobile phone. For now, this is how the system guarantees the “personal” nature of the vote. However, it is clearly not 100% guaranteed. The possibility of using facial recognition on mobile phones is being studied to give further assurance. The votes are received by the Senate’s computer systems and the application prepares them to be added to the in-person votes. Once the vote takes place in person, the results shown on the screens in the plenary hall and those published on the website reflect the votes cast in-person and those cast remotely. It is currently not technically possible to have remote voting and in-person voting at the same time. In-person voting needs to be held after remote voting, which means that if there is a change of opinion in the way a political group votes, it is not possible for those who voted remotely to change their vote during this period of time. In any case, the electronic system for in-person voting remains blocked for senators authorised to vote remotely. So the same parliamentarian cannot cast two votes.

### **Other considerations regarding remote voting.**

An evaluation can be carried out on the cases for remote voting:

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



- *In the cases of illness or accident: if the illness or accident is serious, is the parliamentarian in a position to follow the session and cast a vote? If not, does it prevent them from being in the chamber? And if someone is going through surgery?*
- *Attendance at international meetings: IPU Assembly, for example. Can someone participate in a committee or plenary meeting and cast a vote in the Senate? Maybe. But can they follow the debates in both forums?*
- *The broadness of the formulation used in the Standing Orders (cases “... such as...”) opens the door to interpretations that may be overly flexible and potentially create problems.*

The usual and logical parliamentary practice of extending the political negotiation of some of the issues to be voted on to immediately before the vote (amendments to laws, for example), involves delays in remote voting that affect the running of the agenda and sometimes require the suspension of the session to allow those voting remotely sufficient time to have a proper understanding of the text of the matter to be voted on. The remote voting system also entails rigidity in the in-person voting process that prevents or makes it extremely difficult, for example, to change the voting order of the amendments.

## 6.2. MPs and conflict of interest

The question for the discussions were: *what constitutes a conflict of interest? should MPs be able to work in other roles while also being parliamentarians? and which jobs add value to the work of parliamentarians?. Furthermore, how do we manage conflicts of interest: What are the rules for MPs? What are the rules for parliamentary staff and assistants?*

### **The Republic of Congo**

#### **Context and definition:**

The conflict of interest puts the parliamentarian in a position to manage two divergent interests, public and private. Its mandate being national. A conflict of interest is a situation of interference between the duties and obligations of parliamentarians and a private or personal interest that may influence the exercise of their parliamentary functions.

Interest can be political or moral. It can be a parliamentarian who, for example, would participate in the vote of a subsidy for an association of which he is a member even if he does not derive any profit from it. Elsewhere, a parliamentarian can be prosecuted for the illegal taking of interests. This interest is linked to the personal situation of the parliamentarian, to the past or current professional activity as well as to that of his parents or children and his spouse. It is also a situation where a parliamentarian is at the center of decision-making and where his objectivity or neutrality may be called into question. Article 185, paragraph 3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Senate provides that no one may be part of a commission of inquiry whose subject concerns his political group, his provincial group, his political party, his association, his own person, his interests or those of a relative or ally.

#### **Exercise of other activities by the parliamentarian**



In general, parliamentarians cannot exercise other professional activities during their mandate except for the liberal profession, in particular that of a lawyer, doctor, university professor, etc. Article 108 of the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Congo states the following:

“The mandate of National Deputy is incompatible with the mandate of Senator and vice versa.

**The mandate of Deputy or Senator is incompatible with the following functions or mandates:**

- *Member of the Government ;*
- *Member of a democracy support institution ;*
- *Member of the Armed Forces, national police and security services ;*
- *Magistrate ;*
- *Career agent of the State public services ;*
- *Politico-administrative framework of the territory, with the exception of the Heads of community-chiefdoms and groupings ;*
- *Active public officer ;*
- *Member of the Cabinets of the President of the Republic, of the Prime Minister, of the President of the National Assembly, of the President of the Senate, of the members of the Government and generally of a political or administrative authority of the State, employed in a public company or in a semi-public company;*
- *Any other elective office.*

The mandate of National Deputy or Senator is incompatible with the exercise of remunerated functions conferred by a foreign State or an international organization. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, we can cite a few cases that have been the subject of conflicts of interest by parliamentarians:

- *The endorsement of the members of the Office of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI).*
- *It took place during a plenary marked by incidents. Opposition parties felt that the process of appointing CENI officers had not been characterized by consensus.*
- *The voting of the electoral law: there was a controversy over the electoral law voted in the National Assembly which, for some, the majority in Parliament was preparing an electoral fraud. The Senate this law in divergent terms from the National Assembly for not having taken into account the transparency of voting operations, the method of voting, the representativeness of women and the certification of voting results.*
- *The vote of the members of the Office of a Parliamentary Assembly, sometimes by order of the leaders of the political parties or the Head of the grouping of the political parties, called "MORAL AUTHORITY".*
- *Parliamentary inquiry: composition of certain commissions of inquiry in a given province with natives of the said province under penalty of being judge and party.*
- *The forfeiture of a member of the Government by motions of no confidence: sometimes, the plenary rejects them by judging them to be food, inappropriate or unfounded; he also*



*manages to adopt them quite simply by internal division of a political family and which has nothing to do with the general interest.*

## **Tools to prevent conflicts of interest**

### **For parliamentarians**

- *The Constitution ;*
- *The Rules of Procedure in the chapter on obligations, incompatibilities, the disciplinary system as well as on the Conciliation and Arbitration Committee.*

In the Senate of the Democratic Republic of Congo, in its articles 76 and 77 of the Rules of Procedure provide that the Conciliation and Arbitration Committee has the mission to conciliate and, if necessary, decide between, by way of arbitration, the parties in conflict. Only disputes likely to be settled can be brought before this Committee. This Committee comprises two chambers, one sitting at the first level and the other at the appeal level. Referral to the Conciliation Committee by a third party automatically entails waiver of the jurisdiction of the Courts and Tribunals, subject to compliance with procedural deadlines.

### **For parliamentary staff**

- *The status of State public service career agents ;*
- *The code of the public agent of the State ;*
- *The code of good conduct ;*
- *The Administrative Regulations.*

## **Main recommendations on conflict of interest**

- *Provide provisions in the Rules of Procedure requiring the declaration of interests by the parliamentarian at the beginning of the legislature ;*
- *Create a body to monitor the veracity of declarations of interests ;*
- *Set penalties in the event of dishonesty in the said declarations ;*
- *Establishment of a code of ethics in order to ensure compliance with ethical principles, in particular respect for the general interest, the principles of objectivity, neutrality and probity.*

## **7.0. Theme 5: the role of parliaments in combatting climate change**

### **7.1. Egyptian House of Representatives**

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





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

Egypt meets today under global conditions that carry with them accelerating political and economic challenges, which have forced the legislative councils to face and manage them with a high level of efficiency and professionalism. At the forefront of these challenges is what the world has been facing for years of severe climate fluctuations due to the "Global warming" crisis, that increased the emissions of harmful gases into the atmosphere. However, the repercussions and implications of this crisis are constantly increasing, which threatens the sustainability of natural resources, especially non-renewable ones, as well as the future of most living organisms on earth due to natural disasters and spread of diseases and epidemics resulting from them. There is no doubt that the issue of climate change has become a concern for the whole world, and a lot of efforts have been made to confront it at the national, regional and international levels. Many conferences have been held to discuss ways to confront it, the most recent of which was the 27th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in the Egyptian city of Sharm el-Sheikh in last November.

The conference witnessed broad parliamentary participation, represented in the international parliamentary meeting that was held on the side-lines of COP27 in cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union on November 13th, 2022. It brought together parliamentary delegations from more than 60 countries as well as many regional, international and parliamentary organizations in addition to a number of international high-level personalities. Extensive discussions took place on ways to support international efforts to confront climate change, reduce global warming and work to activate the role of parliamentary diplomacy in this regard.

Parliaments have to play a pivotal role in confronting climate change which threaten the future of the entire world and contribute to the development of environmental policies and legislations to mitigate climate change, develop the capabilities of new and clean energy and present incentives to encourage the transformation towards green economy in a way that would contribute to achieving sustainable development. Therefore, The Senate of Egypt had tackled twice the climate change and its effect on the environment: the first time was before COP 27 last November, and the second was after the conference and discussed its outcome. The Senate called the members for the need of taking necessary measures to mitigate the effects of climate changes under the presiding role of Egypt to the summit this year until the handing of its presidency to United Arab Emirates. Moreover, The Senate discusses at the present time a comparative study of Carbon market and Carbon tax in order to shed the light on this critical part; as Carbon has effects on environment and climate change. On the other hand, parliaments possess oversight tools that enable them to hold executive bodies accountable and monitor their compliance with environmental policies. Parliaments can hold public hearings and invite government





officials to testify before the concerned committees and demand to rectify shortcomings in the performance of the executive bodies.

The Parliament can also play an active role in confronting climate change through its competence to discuss and approve the state budget as well as its oversight over various objects of expenditure. Thus, the parliament can allocate a certain percentage of this budget to develop clean energy sectors, replace polluting sectors, set specific incentives to reduce the negative effects of climate change and adopt approaches that would reduce greenhouse emissions. By means of these budget allocations, the parliament could enhance capacity-building in terms of adapting to climate change, preserving natural resources and green areas, developing infrastructure to face the effects of climate change as well as tools for disaster risk reduction and promoting scientific research and technology transfer. The recent years have revealed that the universal conventions pertaining to climate changes won't achieve its desired goals unless national decision makers realize the seriousness of the problem and the necessity of everyone's cooperation in order to be able to confront it; as we live in one planet with a common destiny. This is when the role of national parliaments becomes prominent concerning the approval of these treaties; which provide a major boost of confronting climate change in the coming years by inserting them in national legislations, confirming parliaments' commitment to these treaties' provisions and creating some kind of national consensus among governmental institutions, effective parties, civil society organizations, business owners and all concerned stakeholders. We now need -more than ever- to activate the mechanisms of international work and solidarity to face climate change threats and mitigate its catastrophic effects. The parliamentary diplomacy should play a crucial role in this context. Besides, it is beyond doubt that the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments is one of the effective parliamentary platforms in the context of international parliamentary union for dialogue, joint coordination and exchange of experiences among secretaries generals of national parliaments, which contribute to enhancing the parliaments' capabilities in confronting this crisis and other crises that face our contemporary world. At the conclusion of my speech, I'm grateful for your listening and I'm confident that our meeting will achieve the desired goals and aims, specially with the participation of this distinguished elite of secretaries generals who have a long history in institutional parliamentary work. With my sincere wishes of health and well-being for you, and I hope for your people the continuous progress and prosperity.

## 7.2. Parliament of India

### Introduction

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



deleterious consequences on human health, wildlife, food production and the economy as a whole.

## **India – A Key Player in Climate Action**

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

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

## **Role of Government in Tackling Climate Change**

It is widely acknowledged that Governments play a vital role in addressing climate change by implementing policies to decrease greenhouse gas emissions, endorsing sustainable land use practices and promoting renewable energy sources. Governments can also contribute to global climate change negotiations and establish a framework for combating climate change while raising awareness and educating the public to generate support for action. Additionally, Governments can promote climate change education through public awareness and by incorporating it into school curriculums. The Indian Government acknowledges the significant role the country can play in addressing the worldwide crisis of climate change and as such has been proactively implementing measures to combat it. The country aims to achieve 500 Giga Watt of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030, reduce the total projected carbon emission by an additional one billion tones, reduce the carbon intensity of the economy by less than 45 per cent, fulfil 50 per cent of energy requirements through renewable waste by 2030, and achieve net zero.

## **Adaptation and Mitigation Responses by Indian Government to Tackle Climate Change**

India's updated Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC), submitted to the UNFCCC in August 2022 further reaffirms our commitment to work towards a low carbon emission pathway. The Indian Government has established ambitious goals to decrease the country's greenhouse gas emissions intensity by 33-35per cent by 2030 in comparison to 2005 levels. Moreover, the Government aims to achieve 40 percent of its installed electricity capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030 and to expand its forest coverage to



33percent of its overall land area. No doubt these targets are ambitious and formidable, nevertheless, India has already made significant strides towards transitioning to a green economy. The Indian Government has implemented various initiatives in recent years to transform its economy and adopt low carbon development path. The country is rapidly increasing its use of renewable energy sources like wind, solar and hydro power. As is evident, India already has numerous policy measures in place that could accelerate the shift to cleaner and more efficient technologies. In 2021, India was ranked fourth in the world in terms of installed renewable energy capacity. The country is implementing measures to adapt to the impacts of climate change, such as developing climate-resilient infrastructure and promoting sustainable agriculture practices.

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

### **Parliamentary Action on Climate Change**

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

- **Firstly**, Parliaments play a vital role in combating climate change by developing policies and laws that promote sustainable development, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and encourage the transition towards renewable energy.
  
- **Secondly**, their oversight role requires them to seek Government assurances on matters of critical development or climate concerns on the floor of the House, raising issues or asking for special discussions pertaining to country's planned trajectory for National Statement by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at COP26 Summit in Glasgow, Press Information Bureau, dated 1 November 2021 green economy or attainment of SDG. In addition to policy-making, they can assess the effectiveness of Government policies and programs in addressing climate change and ensure that the necessary resources are allocated towards the implementation of these initiatives, both aspects being important in ensuring a country's response and resilience to climate change.
  
- **Thirdly**, Parliamentarians can also raise awareness and educate citizens about the impacts of climate change and the steps they can take to contribute to a sustainable future. They can engage with various stakeholders such as NGOs, businesses, and academic institutions to collaborate on sustainable initiatives that benefit both the environment and the economy. It is the duty of legislators to generate awareness



among their constituents regarding the varied development initiatives taken by the Government for ensuring their overall progress particularly to ease the brunt of climate change and global warming.

## **Role of Indian Parliament in Combating Climate Change**

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

The procedure of parliamentary questions has also been extensively used by Members to elicit information about Government actions to deal with environmental problems. Parliamentary questions have often been concerned about the impacts of climate change on agriculture, coastal areas and health and mitigation issues related to energy, agriculture and aviation.

The issue of climate change and related issues have also been discussed extensively in our Parliament. Our Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committees on Science & technology, Environment & Forest has provided recommendations on policies related to air pollution, water pollution, waste management, and biodiversity conservation, among other issues and has laws and regulations related to environmental protection. Likewise, Committee on Energy has been instrumental in promoting the development and use of renewable energy in India. It has provided recommendations on policies and programs related to renewable energy, such as the National Solar Mission, and helped to shape the country's energy transition. Strengthen environmental governance in India by providing recommendations on laws and regulations related to environmental protection. Likewise, Committee on Energy has been instrumental in promoting the development and use of renewable energy in India. It has provided recommendations on policies and programs related to renewable energy, such as the National Solar Mission, and helped to shape the country's energy transition. Indian Parliament has been taking steps to encourage international cooperation on climate change by participating in global climate negotiations, sharing knowledge and expertise with other countries and collaborating on research and development on research and development of clean energy technologies.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is not only the responsibility of every individual and Government to the fight against climate change, Parliaments also have a significant role to play in addressing



this global crisis. In recent years, the Indian Government has taken several steps to address climate change, which have helped to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move towards a low carbon economy. The Government has made commitments to mitigate climate change and the current G-20 Presidency provides an opportunity to further advance global climate action and find lasting solutions to the vexed issue. They have the power to enact legislations and enforce policies, hold Governments accountable, raise awareness, and promote global cooperation towards achieving a sustainable future. Overall, the Indian Parliament has been playing a significant role in combating climate change. However, there still room for further raising the level of parliamentary debate on climate change. While the efforts of individual Parliaments remains critical to achieve effective action, it is essential that Parliaments work together on a global level to develop unified policies and strategies that address the root causes of climate change. International cooperation is crucial in mitigating climate change, and Parliament can play an essential role in facilitating such cooperation. We need to work together with our Parliaments towards building a more resilient and sustainable planet.

### 7.3. Parliament of Libya

Excellences, Members of the General Secretaries Association of National Parliaments, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Attendance May the peace, blessings, and mercy of God be upon you At the beginning of my intervention, I would like to express my thanks to you for giving me the opportunity to present my intervention, which includes a pivotal and important topic that poses a direct threat to humanity in the continuation of life. Climate change has become the most important and urgent global issue that has crossed borders and is now facing all of humanity and is getting deeper day by day than ever before. Accordingly, climate justice and intergenerational equity should be central to achieving all our national goals and aspirations. Realizing that the environmental issue has implications for all social, economic and security policies, and the issue of combating climate change requires a great deal of long-term planning to access the information and data that parliaments need due to its impact on the living environment, human health, prosperity and water availability. And food security, migration, urban growth, and poor and marginalized groups. Therefore, the matter requires the development of appropriate measures and mechanisms and the formation of policy frameworks that enhance the role of parliaments to contribute to combating climate change. Accordingly, we see that the task of parliaments in combating climate change lies in the implementation of their legislative, oversight, and representative roles, and budgets start from facing the challenges that affect the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in general because there is a close relationship between them. In this, parliaments can contribute to combating climate change through the following: Parliaments should be an essential part of the process of developing strategies from the outset, and not in the stages of adopting legislation supporting combating climate change. Follow-up on the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the decisions of previous sessions and their results for the Conference of the Parties to this agreement and the obligations and pledges resulting from that. Supporting climate-





related legislative processes to achieve the goals of sustainable development in all its dimensions, effectively and in support of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. Holding governments accountable for their national, regional and international commitments on climate change through the development of mechanisms to ensure effective oversight and accountability. Enhancing the role of parliaments in particular towards proposing, reviewing, amending and monitoring the effective implementation of climate legislation. Engage parliaments in efforts to mobilize and expand the necessary climate finance to ensure that sufficient funding is allocated in national budgets and spent effectively to enhance action towards the effects of climate change to advance towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Enabling parliamentary committees to contribute to preparing studies, reviewing climate legislative policies, and providing opinions to ensure integrated decision-making processes Parliaments can strengthen the legislative response at the national level and align it with international agreements and treaties related to climate action. Activating the representative role of parliamentarians by involving their constituencies in discussions and consultations on the grounds that they are the real stakeholders, reviewing relevant national plans, identifying gaps and weaknesses and their impact at the national and international levels. Work to activate the role of civil society organizations, academic organizations, and regional and international institutions to confront waste transport crimes that affected the climate by setting legal rules and international mechanisms regarding forcing countries to respect the environment and human life. Parliaments carry out the task of political pressure by evaluating the climate impact of all legislation to increase the optimal use of clean and renewable energy technology. Existence of strong parliamentary cooperation to find international solutions that ensure that all countries are able to face the inevitable challenges Parliaments can play their role in developing policies that allow adaptation and mitigation to withstand climate change by creating a development vision for a healthy environment that encourages reducing the risks of environmental pollution. Achieving the oversight role and accountability with regard to the implementation of relevant national laws and plans and regional and international agreements When approving and approving budgets, taking into account the various aspects of sectors, institutions and state structures in order to achieve the goals of sustainable development 2030 in general and the goal related to climate change in particular. In conclusion, and out of keenness of the Libyan House of Representatives to combat climate change, it formed a committee specialized in supervising support for the United Nations emergency agreement on climate change, leading local efforts and initiatives to mitigate and adapt to it, reviewing and expressing institutional opinion on its programs and projects, and cooperating and coordinating with existing local, regional and global efforts and initiatives and ensuring the participation of all relevant parties Thank you for listening, I wish our meeting every success

#### 7.4. The National Assembly of Turkey: *Green Assembly*

### **Fact Sheet**

### **Measures Taken to Protect Nature and the Green**





- The use of **electric vehicles** has increased, and currently 10 electric vehicles are in use in our Green Assembly, contributing to the reduction of carbon emission.
- More weight is given to the **aromatic plants** grown by us in our greenhouses, which helps to save irrigation water and contributes to the ecosystem in the garden of the Assembly.
- The nuts of the oaks in the garden of Green National Assembly Turkey [GNAT] are picked up every year and delivered to the authorities concerned. In this way, the oaknuts of the parliament spring to life and contribute to the green world and environment in different places.
- The use of **plastic** glasses, forks and spoons has been restricted within the Parliament, minimizing the use of plastic products.
- We feed our non-human friends such as cats, dogs, and squirrels on the campus of GNAT.

### **Zero Waste Project and Its Implementation in the GNAT**

*Non-hazardous waste* (paper, plastic, glass, metal) is segregated in our Assembly within the scope of the Zero Waste projects, contributing to the environment.

- Hazardous waste (fluorescence, toner, waste mineral oil, auto parts, etc.) is collected separately and delivered to licensed companies within the scope of Zero Waste project again; thus, potential negative effects of such waste are prevented.
  - Source-separated waste is taken to the **Temporary Waste Storage Area**, and then it is delivered to the companies that have the environmental permit.
  - The waste in the kitchens and tea houses inside the GNAT is collected separately and taken to the Temporary storage area, where it is turned into **Compost (organic fertilizer)**. The organic waste is turned into compost and used by the *Department of Park and Garden Services* to improve the soil quality in different places. Thus, we both contribute to the environment and prevent the waste of resources.
  - The **waste cooking oil** in the kitchens of our Assembly is collected separately and delivered to licensed companies. Thus, we help to prevent water and soil pollution.
  - Waste batteries are collected separately through the **waste battery collection containers** placed on the floors on the GNAT. Thus, we help to prevent environmental pollution to a significant extent.
  - Zero Waste Project of the GNAT is carried out sensitively. Thus, we prevent the waste of resources and promote resource efficiency.
- **Within the scope of the Waste Management Policy of GNAT;**
  - **250 tons** of paper have been recycled since 2018, saving **4000 trees**.

**By the end of 2022, our Zero Waste data were as follows:**

- **27 tons** of plastic were recycled, saving **435** barrels of fuel.
- **22 tons** of metal waste were recycled, saving approximately **29 tons** of raw materials.



- **211 kgs** of batteries were collected, preventing the pollution of approximately **14 million** tons of water and **70 decares** of soil.
- **1.250 kgs** of organic waste were turned into 350 kgs of organic fertilizer through the organic waste composting machi

## 7.5. The United Arab Emirates

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

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

- **First:** The parliaments will not be able to combat this phenomenon without effective cooperation with the executive authorities, as confronting this problem is not only related to the adoption of regulated legislation to reduce the negative effects of global warming, governments must have a strong political will to implement legislative obligations. What supports this is the fact that Paris Agreement and other international conventions that recognize the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions have not been adhered to as expected. This was due to the differences between countries regarding their implementation paths or adapting to the local environment to cope with these international obligations.
- **Second:** The reduction of greenhouse gases requires global funding, which may exceed a trillion dollars, and this figure may double if this phenomenon is not confronted in the next few years. In addition to the need to compensate developing countries that are not responsible for more than 1% of the world's planet-warming gases. Despite the agreement in "Cop 27" that was held in Cairo to establish a fund to provide the necessary financing to combat climate change, the global political administrations were not effective enough to meet the financial commitments estimated to confront the phenomenon. Hence, parliaments have a primary responsibility to urge their governments, through their oversight roles, to fulfill the commitments of the "Cop 27" held in Cairo, in addition to taking measures to compensate developing countries for the losses and damages of global warming. Parliaments, within the framework of their oversight roles, must review



government environmental parliamentary reports regarding the evaluation of their public policies, and the extent of their success in limiting the effects of this phenomenon. So that there can be an effective and transparent evaluation in the "COP 28" that will be held in the United Arab Emirates next November.

- **Third:** It is also important that the oversight role in parliaments has a major influence on the general government policies and that the environmental dimension is considered in these policies. Environmental policies are no longer a luxury that can be postponed for reasons of citizens' basic needs policies. Rather, they have become the engine that drives other policies in the areas of housing, infrastructure, transportation, health, industry, agriculture, and other public policies. Parliaments can emphasize the importance and need for environmental policies to be a major component in all other areas of public policies through their oversight tools, in order to maintain a safe future for the coming generations.
- **Fourth:** In the process of discussing and approving public budgets and final accounts during their presentation to parliaments, it is necessary to emphasize the provision of the necessary financial resources to combat global warming and limit harmful environmental activities, and to adopt a kind of qualitative budget allocated to confront such phenomenon.

Perhaps these points that I have raised have been implemented by the policy of the United Arab Emirates voluntarily and deliberately, in order to achieve the goals of sustainable development and confront the negative effects of climate change. The success of the UAE in its specific policies to confront this phenomenon has gained the country the confidence of the countries to host the twenty-eighth session of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is to be held in November this year. This conference is an exceptional opportunity to build partnerships and ensure inclusiveness, in order to achieve harmonization between sustainable development and climate action. It will also be a unique event as the conference will witness the completion of the first global outcome to assess the progress in implementing the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement.

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

The Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates works closely with the government of the country in its support to address the phenomenon of climate change, as the Council approved many legislations regulating environmental affairs, which has enforced integrated legislative system all over the environmental sectors, whether in



agriculture, industry, clean energy or encouraging scientific research. The Federal National Council also monitors general environmental policies and made constructive recommendations in this regard that the government worked to implement, which had a positive and effective impact on reducing the consequences of the climate change phenomenon. Also, the Council stresses the success of the cooperation between the legislative and executive authorities in the UAE in protecting the citizens from environmental damage and complying with international commitments. The country's hosting the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 28) has led to intensified national initiatives, in cooperation with many countries of the world, in order to ensure a sustainable, low-carbon future. The Conference has contributed to the exchange of information and technology, increasing the expenditure on scientific research, taking guaranteed measures, and proposing effective solutions in this regard.

## 7.6. The Thai Senate

Climate change is currently one of the most severe threats facing the whole world, and it has become a global agenda in 2015 all member states of the United Nations adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as a call to action to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, to ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of peace and prosperity by 2030. Realizing the threats of climate change, Thailand formulated the first National Strategic Plan on Climate Change 2008-2013 and it recently reinforced with the Climate Change Master Plan 2015-2050 providing a long-term national framework for climate change and low carbon growth promotion according to sustainable development principle, a policy framework for the development of mechanisms and tools, government agencies and relevant organizations with a framework for detailed action plans and budget allocation to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2065. These are reasons why all Thai sectors should play an active role in combatting climate change.

### **Thai Senate and Climate Change Issues**

In this connection, the Thai Senate recognizes the significance of climate change as a global disaster and always raised up this issue either in the international level development policy on protecting the environment and improving climate change situation for the Senate and the Secretariat of the Senate to collaborate and move forward to its environmental development, pollution prevention, efficient use of energy resources, and properly use of digital technology for enhancing its Secretariat to become “eco-friendly workplace”. Subsequently, the Secretary General of the Senate put this policy as one of the top priorities in annual action plan 2021. After the adoption of the new environmental policy, coincidentally, the Secretariat was preparing to move to the new parliament building. So, it was a perfect time for making.

**Green Office Standard**” from the Department of Environmental Quality Promotion and Faculty of Environment and Resources Studies of Mahidol University. This Green Office Standard” was developed to lessen resource consumption and wastage in the work process, achieve savings and minimizing carbon emission from the office’s operations in



the environment, the national level. The President of the Thai Senate also initiated the environmental development policy on protecting the environment and improving climate change situation for the Senate and the Secretariat of the Senate to collaborate and move forward to its environmental development, pollution prevention, efficient use of energy resources, and properly use of digital technology for enhancing its Secretariat to become **“eco-friendly workplace”**. Subsequently, the Secretary General of the Senate put this policy as one of the top priorities in annual action plan 2021. After the adoption of the new environmental policy, coincidentally, the Secretariat was preparing to move to the new parliament building. So, it was a perfect time for making the new operational plan for environmental sustainability, and energy and water conservation measures. Therefore, the Secretariat of the Senate adopts **“Green Office Standard”** from the Department of Environmental Quality Promotion and Faculty of Environment and Resources Studies of Mahidol University. This **“Green Office Standard”** was developed to lessen resource consumption and waste age in the work process, achieve savings and minimizing carbon emission from the office’s operations in the environment,

Green Office Award from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Thailand. The most significant factor for our story is **“leadership.”** Leadership is not only from the President or the Secretariat of the Senate but also from assigned people in the organization. With the leadership, these people can encourage others to engage in the eco-friendly activities in the workplace and also in their daily life. The next factor is the engagement of the Senators, officials, staff members and concerning people. To get all people to participate in this journey, it starts with their awareness of the climate change issues and their consciousness. Thus, the **“communication”** is very important in this process especially to cascade the goal and direction of the Green Senate Plan. **Lastly**, the Culture, which is the way that people live in the workplace is crucial for the implementation of our Green Journey. We found out that to build the Green culture we need the role model not only one but many of them. Starting with the collaboration from the senators and senior staff members, led by the Secretary General of the Senate, they adopt the 3 R concepts and also lead by example in order to encourage others to accept this new way of living in the workplace and daily life and the result is not yet announced. However, by providing this paper, we would love to share our story and the lessons we learnt from our journey to Green Senate as follows.

**In conclusion**, although Thai Senate and its Secretariat is still in the journey to fully become the Green Senate with the long term goal to motivating all concerning personnel for resource efficiency, energy conservation, reduce pollution and wastage in the offices’ work process and recycle the generated waste and these behavioral changes will lead to environmental sustainability. The Senate do believe that with our strong commitment and our duties as global citizens to help protect environment and promote sustainable planet before handing it to the next generation and we will definitely achieve the ultimate goal of **the Green parliament of Thailand**, together with the House of Representatives in the very near future.





## 8.0. Theme 6: Digital Parliaments

### 8.1. Parliament of Thailand

#### **Introduction**

*Theme: 'e-Initiative: The role of the House of Representatives in empowering voters to lodge a bill through the digital platform'*

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

#### **Development of Thailand's Bill Initiative Process**

More than 90 percent of the bills are submitted by the Council of Ministers; however, eligible voters have been granted the right to introduce a bill directly to the National Assembly for the first time by the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2540 (1997), which stipulated that at least 50,000 voters can initiate a bill. Bills introduced this way must be related to the rights and liberties of the Thai people or the duties of the Thai people. The rules and procedures for initiating the bills by eligible voters were prescribed in the Initiative Process Act, B.E. 2542 (1999). Later, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2550 (2007) reduced the minimum number of people required to submit a bill to 10,000 people, along with an amendment and promulgation of the Initiative Process Act, B.E. 2556 (2013). This 2013 Act was to make the people's initiative process more accessible and practical by specifying procedures for initiating, examining, and publishing the list of sponsors, as well as allowing the sponsors to withdraw their names if they were used without their consent. Nowadays, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2560 (2017) requires at least 10,000 voters to be able to initiate a bill. It also includes a new section enabling at least 50,000 voters to submit a motion for amending the Constitution. Thailand reforms its legislative process to create mechanisms to help people in drafting and proposing draft bills. For this reason, the Initiative Process Act, B.E. 2564 (2021) has been promulgated to be in line with the current Constitution.

#### **The New Initiative Process Act: Roles of the Secretariat**

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





## **Guidelines**

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

## **Consideration of Principle**

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

## **Inviting signatories**

If the eligible voters prepare the bill by themselves, 10,000 signatories for a bill or 50,000 signatories for a draft constitutional amendment, as well as all supporting documents, shall be collected before introducing the bill to the Secretariat of the House of Representatives. It. There is no requirement that eligible voters should finish collecting signatures within a time limit. If the eligible voters request the Secretariat of the House of Representatives to work on this process, the Secretariat shall invite other voters to support the bill and collect the names of sponsors through an appropriate channel, including a digital platform. If within a year this process doesn't manage to meet the required number of signatories, the Secretariat shall refer this matter to the initiators, and the latter shall continue rallying the voters. If in another 90 days, the required number of signatories is still not met, the Secretariat shall cease the process.

## **Submitting and introducing**

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



## Challenges within the Traditional Process

Under the provision of the previous laws on the initiative process, the eligible voters who initiate a bill are not only required to draft the bill themselves but also to publicize, invite and find sponsors by collecting a list of names with supporting documents for signing on the bill proposal themselves. The documents include a form with the sponsor's signature, a copy of the sponsor's House Registration, and a copy of the sponsor's ID card, all in physical form. At least 10,000 sets of these papers must be examined before proceeding any further. After the examination of all supporting documents, the Secretariat of the House of Representatives must collect all sponsors' ID numbers from those supporting documents and send them to the Department of Provincial Administration to verify the identity of each sponsor and confirm whether they are eligible voters. The letter of confirmation will be sent to all sponsors after the verification process. All of these steps are time-consuming and required a large amount of manpower to accomplish the process within a limited time as stipulated by the law. Moreover, it generates massive amounts of paper, leads to environmental degradation, and exacerbates climate change issues.

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

Since Thailand adopted the country's strategic and reform plans, focusing on the use of information technology in the government sector to facilitate public service, there is another law, the Digitalization of Public Administration and Services Delivery Act, B.E. 2562 (2019), requiring all government agencies to use digital ID instead of physical documents. In addition, the Secretariat of the House of Representatives has its strategy for transforming itself into a **SMART Parliament**, emphasizing digital development within the office. Therefore, in 2021, the Secretariat hosted a Hackathon, inviting undergraduates majoring in Computer Science to join the brainstorming session on designing and developing the digital platform for the initiative process.

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

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

- **Entity:** Applicant who needs to prove their identity before using the service



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

Since the e-Initiative has been launched in 2023, there are 7 bills and a draft constitutional amendment initiated by eligible voters through this platform. One of them, namely the Bill on National Pension and Social Welfare for the Elderly, is the first bill that completed its collecting signatories process with 12,069 sponsors. Now, it is in the stage of submitting evidence to be examined.

## 8.2. Parliament of India:

### Introduction

Theme: *Use of ICT in promoting transparency, accessibility, efficiency and economy*

Today, ICT applications are found in almost all spheres of human activity, including business, education, health, employment, sustainable development and environment. The use of ICT applications have brought us to the information age, where the right to access information held by public bodies has, by and large, become an important right for the citizens. ICT has transformed democracies by giving accessibility to information to the citizens, promoting a culture of transparency and accountability in governance. It facilitates them to meaningfully participate in the governing process and enables them to exercise their rights.

The *World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)* held in two phases, in Geneva and Tunis in 2003 and 2005, gave a major impetus in creating “a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society.” Since 2006, the WSIS Forum has been held annually to review and take stock of the progress made in furthering the agenda of the WSIS.

Parliaments did not lag behind in this effort. The *Global Centre for Information and Communication Technologies in Parliament*, a joint initiative of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, was an outcome of the World Summit. Under the aegis of the *Global Centre for ICT in Parliament*, four annual World e-Parliament Conferences have been held from 2007 to 2010, which thereafter has become a biennial affair. The 2018 Conference is due to take place in December this year.



The *Global Centre for ICT in Parliament* has rendered invaluable services to strengthen the role of Parliaments in the promotion of an information society and the use of ICT in the parliamentary processes. Activities carried out through the IPU and international cooperation have facilitated this process and assisted Parliaments in applying ICTs in their own legislative environment. Developments in the ICT have thus opened up many channels of parliamentary co-operation. They have also facilitated the communication of information and the work done by Parliaments and legislatures to the people. In recent years, Parliaments across the globe have made much progress in exploiting advances in ICT to support their functions and to modernize their institutions so as to make them more transparent, accessible, accountable and effective.

### **Use of ICT in the Indian Parliament**

In the Indian Parliament also, several positive changes have taken place in the use of ICT in organizing parliamentary functions and facilitating the flow of information. As part of our efforts to modernize, it has been our constant endeavour to increasingly adopt new tools and methods offered by technological advances in ICT to support the law-making, representational and the oversight functions of parliamentarians and to make it more open, accessible and responsive to citizens.

As the citizenry becomes better informed and more vociferous in demanding accountability and transparency of the public institutions, the Indian Parliament has responded to such demands with new legislative enactments to make right to information a citizen's right and to encourage the use of information technology in public institutions and service delivery as core components of governance.

The Parliament of India has taken significant steps in developing information technology to assist parliamentarians in the effective discharge of their duties. The computer-based information retrieval system, namely Computerized Information Service (Parliament Library Information System) was started in December 1985 with the help of the National Informatics Centre (NIC). Computerized Information Service was designed within the Library for the benefit of Members of Parliament. Initially it was a database of subject indexed references to parliamentary information. Later, all the databases were converted into full text databases in the Web format and were made available on the Parliament of India Home Page. Over the years, the Computer Centre has played a key role in the modernization and computerization of not only the Parliament Library but also of the entire Lok Sabha Secretariat.

#### ***Robust ICT infrastructure and facilities to MPs:***

- To facilitate sharing of data and access to the Internet, a high speed Local Area Network (LAN) has been laid. The computer connectivity to the outside world including the Internet is being provided through the National Informatics Centre Network known as the NICNET. LAN is periodically upgraded and all the three buildings of the Parliament precinct have been made Wi-Fi enabled. Both the Chambers of Parliament are now Wi-Fi-enabled so that the members can access the government websites and other parliamentary information available on intranet on their mobile devices within the Chambers also.



- All political parties which have been allotted accommodation within the Parliament House Complex are entitled to have a set of computer hardware and related accessories and internet connection provided by the Secretariat.
- Orientation programmes are organized regularly at the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training for the benefit of MPs and officials in acquiring knowledge and developing or sharpening their skills in various uses of information technology for parliamentary work. These are conducted by the specialized agencies. A Computer Training Room has been set up in the Parliament Library Building to conduct regular training programmes for members of Parliament, their staff and officers of Parliament.
- **From the viewpoint of analysis**, various measures that have been introduced serve one or two or all of four goals – transparency, efficiency, economy and accessibility. Since they have cross-cutting effects and cannot be categorized neatly on these four goals, only the major impacts, highlighting where the most visible effects are felt in our parliamentary functioning, are presented here.

### **ICT promoting Transparency and Accessibility**

- ***Parliament of India Home Page:*** The launch of the Parliament of India Home Page on 15 March 1996 was a significant step in opening up parliamentary information for the public. It has become an important source of information and reference tool about the Constitution of India, history of Indian Parliament, its practice and procedure, biographical profiles of the members of both the Houses, the socio-economic background of members and the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly, and other relevant information on the two Houses. Separate websites of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha are being maintained by the respective secretariats and are linked onto the Parliament of India Home Page. The Lok Sabha website page contains comprehensive information on the members of Parliament, the business of the House, the text of questions and answers given in the House, the text and synopsis of debates, bills – both government and private – introduced in the House, the Papers Laid on the Table of the Lok Sabha, the Committees and their reports, and various other related information.

There are separate television channels, namely the Rajya Sabha Television (RSTV) for the Upper House and the Lok Sabha Television (LSTV) for the Lower House, which are owned and operated by the respective Secretariats of the two Houses. The programmes of the 24-hour channels are webcast live on their respective websites with links on the websites of the two Houses.

- ***Digitization of parliamentary documents:*** Since the Lok Sabha Website was launched in 1996, the debates of Lok Sabha and the Reports of the Parliamentary Committees prior to 13<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (1998) were available in the Parliament Library in the physical form only. Realizing the archival as well as the reference value of all such parliamentary documents, a step was taken to digitize and provide online access to such rich





repository to the parliamentarians, researchers, media, and other users. The project of a Parliament Digital Library was initiated in July 2012. The following collections have been digitized under the project and are available on a dedicated portal which is yet to be launched into the public domain:

- Lok Sabha Debates of 65 years from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (1952-2018);
  - Parliamentary Committee Reports from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (1952-2018), including the Presidential Addresses and the Budget Speeches;
  - Historical debates from 1858 to 1952 (94 years) which *inter-alia* includes the debates of the Constituent Assembly, the Central Legislative Assembly and the Provisional Parliament, thereby tracing the growth and development of modern parliamentary institutions in India; and
  - Select Lok Sabha Secretariat publications and periodicals.
- ***e-Payment Project:*** Till the end of the financial year 2016-17, all payments made by the Lok Sabha Secretariat were made through the Cheque system. With the launch of the e-Payment system, all transactions made by the Lok Sabha Secretariat are made online. The e-Payment application has been integrated with the Public Finance Management System (PFMS) which is designed to integrate all financial transactions done by the government agencies.
- The digitization project to make the parliamentary documents available on the Parliament website is aimed at putting all parliamentary documents online so that all stakeholders can access them freely. Other services that are available online for the members and officials, including the electronic payment system, further our goal of strengthening transparency.

### **ICT promoting Efficiency and Economy**

- In 2011, keeping pace with the continuous growth in the requirement of members and the rapid development in the field of information technology, the Hon'ble Speaker launched an initiative of "Striving towards e-Parliament and a paperless secretariat" under the Chairmanship of the Secretary-General, Lok Sabha to convert the offices of Lok Sabha Secretariat into a paperless office. Since then, various steps have been taken and various projects are underway.
- ***Members' Portal:*** As an initiative towards e-Parliament and paperless Secretariat, a comprehensive e-portal for the benefit of members has been launched on 17 July 2016. The portal offers several online services including submission of notices for various parliamentary devices in electronic form, online references, etc. Through the e-portal, the members of Parliament can interact with the various Branches of the Secretariat online. Every member has been given a login ID and password, using which they can access the portal. Members can put questions as also give notices for adjournment motion, calling attention motion, zero hour, petitions, etc., online and access the schedules, minutes of the committee meetings and the agenda papers of the Committees and the advance copies of the Bills, their amendments and private members Bills from the Portal. Members can also send





bulk mails and SMS to other members. It also provides facilities for the Government departments to upload Parliamentary Answers and Government Reports.

- ***e-Notice application:*** An important feature of the e-portal is the online submission of Parliamentary Questions and other Notices through the e-Notice application. Earlier, a member had to physically visit or send his/her representative to the Parliament House Complex in the morning for placing different notices. Notices of question are also given in writing to the Secretary-General under the relevant rule. The authenticity of the notices are validated through a two-tier security system using digital signature certificates provided to all members and one time password (OTP) sent to their mobile phone.
- ***e-Wisdom Project:*** The Lok Sabha Secretariat through its e-Wisdom project has considerably reduced the use of paper in the Secretariat by computerization of working of the 14 Branches, mainly those related to finance and personnel management, and putting relevant information on the Lok Sabha Intranet.
- ***e-Office System:*** An e-Office project has been initiated by the Lok Sabha Secretariat to make an entirely paperless office. From the early part of this year, online file management system has been adopted which enables the movement of all files originating from the branches electronically. Besides, the e-Office Management facilitates the online leave management system of all employees of the Secretariat today.
- ***Reduction in circulation of papers:*** In order to make the Parliament and the Secretariat of the two Houses a paperless office, printing and circulation of paper copies of the various parliamentary papers have either been done away with except few copies for record or have been reduced by more than half their previous numbers. These reduced printed copies include Business Advisory Committee Reports, reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General and of the various Commissions of Enquiry.

With the launch of the **e-Portal**, the members can now see the Parliamentary Questions on the portal. This results in considerable reduction in the circulation of the printed Question list. A significant reduction in the use of paper in the Secretariat has been achieved by discontinuing the circulation of hard copies of internal circulars, office forms and all employee-related papers, which are now available on the Intranet.

The various measures and the projects undertaken to make the Secretariat a paperless office is targeted at bringing about efficiency and economy as well as making the functioning of the Secretariat smooth and hassle-free. The intranet containing various types of organizational information has been developed for the benefit of the employees of the Secretariat which also promotes transparency and accessibility.



## Conclusion

- The new ICT tools have enabled the members of Parliaments to organize their work and to carry out their functions more efficiently and effectively. As the functions and activities of the two Houses of our Parliament are assisted by their respective Secretariats, we have adopted a slew of changes in order to meet our goals of transforming into an e-Parliament. The various measures that have been introduced are showing significant impacts in facilitating transparency and accessibility to various stakeholders and contributing towards enhanced efficiency and economy in our parliamentary functioning. Several projects are still ongoing as we make constant efforts to close the gaps.

## 9.0. Theme 7: South-Africa: 'The Role of Parliaments in fighting Intolerance, Promoting Peaceful Co-existence and Inclusive Societies'

### Introduction

#### Continuity in Change

the quest for promotion of peaceful co-existence and inclusive societies and maintenance of international peace and stability is not a novelty. Realising these noble ideas has been a preoccupation of Heads of States and Government, national parliaments, international organizations, multi-lateral and supranational bodies for many years. In fact, creating an inclusive, rules-based, peaceful and stable international order marked by peaceful-coexistence predates the current international system as represented by the United Nations (UN) and its various agencies- the Bretton Woods institutions and other global governance institutions.

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

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



Thus Chapters VI and VII of the UN Charter specifically outline measures to be taken to maintain or restore international peace and security.

**New Agenda for Change: Human Development-** immediately after the post-Cold war period- the focus was on new agenda for change – thus the concepts of human security and human development came to dominate debates on security and development<sup>11</sup>. As they gained strong acceptance in international security, development and legal discourse, they also became instrumental in bringing into the international community's attention the threats that the emerging global issues such as intolerance, absence of peaceful co-existence and inclusive societies, intrastate wars, terrorism, climate change, diseases, food insecurity, human trafficking, displacement and others pose not only to the international peace and security but also to the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

**Creating an Inclusive Society-** In 1995, world leaders made commitments for global social change in the World Summit for Social Development [that resulted to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development]. Amongst others; they committed to '*create an inclusive society*', "a society for all", as one of the key goals of social development. The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme

### **Conceptual Overview: What is Tolerance, Peaceful Co-existence and Inclusive Society?**

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

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

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

**Inclusive Society:** according to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), 'an inclusive society is a society that over-rides differences of race, gender, class, generation, and geography, and ensures inclusion, equality of opportunity as well as capability of all members of the society to determine an agreed set of social institutions that govern social interaction'.The World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen 1995) defines an inclusive society as a "society for all in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play".



Such an inclusive society must be based on respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, cultural and religious diversity, social justice<sup>6</sup> and the special needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, democratic participation and the rule of law. It is promoted by social policies that seek to reduce inequality and create flexible and tolerant societies that embrace all people. The World Summit for Social Development, established the concept of social integration to create an inclusive society, “a society for all”, as one of the key goals of social development.

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

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

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

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

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



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

### **Five Steps of Social Inclusion**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Dimensions and elements of Social Inclusion and Exclusion**

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



## **Key Groups to be Included: Who is Marginalized?**

There is a substantial variation from country to country regarding which groups are subject to exclusion.

- a. Women
- b. People living in poverty
- c. Persons with disabilities
- d. Children, youth and older

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

## **Removing the Obstacles to Social Inclusion**

One mechanism of removing obstacles to social inclusion include eliminating and/or amending Discriminatory Laws and Practices. This is often as the fundamental first step to lay the foundations for an inclusive society. There are core legally binding international human rights treaties within the UN human rights system, which can be effectively applied to promote inclusion of vulnerable groups. These are:

- Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),
- Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR),
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD),
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),
- Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT),
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD), and Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICPMW)

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

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

## **International Policy Frameworks for Achieving Social Inclusion**





It is widely acknowledged that achieving social inclusion requires long-term strategic response on the part of all institutions and organizations, also at an international level. There are mechanisms in place through a variety of international bodies and groups to support empowerment and capacity building of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, and indigenous peoples. In this area, comprehensive frameworks have already been developed with their implementation action plans or programmes adopted at the United Nations summits and conferences. Among others, the following are important:

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

### **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership.

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

- I. *In June 1992, at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, more than 178 countries adopted Agenda 21, a comprehensive plan of action to build a global partnership for sustainable development to improve human lives and protect the environment.*
- II. *Member States unanimously adopted the Millennium Declaration at the Millennium Summit in September 2000 at UN Headquarters in New York. The Summit led to the elaboration of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reduce extreme poverty by 2015.*
- III. *The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Plan of Implementation, adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa in 2002, reaffirmed the global community's commitments to poverty eradication and the environment, and built on Agenda 21 and the Millennium Declaration by including more emphasis on multilateral partnerships.*
- IV. *At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012, Member States adopted the outcome document "The Future We Want" in which they decided, inter alia, to launch a process to develop a set of SDGs to build upon the MDGs and to establish the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. The Rio +20 outcome also contained other measures for implementing sustainable development, including mandates for future programmes of work in development financing, small island developing states and more.*



- V. *In 2013, the General Assembly set up a 30-member Open Working Group to develop a proposal on the SDGs.*
- VI. *In January 2015, the General Assembly began the negotiation process on the post-2015 development agenda. The process culminated in the subsequent adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 17 SDGs at its core, at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015.*
- VII. *2015 was a landmark year for multilateralism and international policy shaping, with the adoption of several major agreements: Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (March 2015) Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development (July 2015) Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 SDGs was adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York in September 2015. Paris Agreement on Climate Change (December 2015) 8.4 The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what these did not achieve. They seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.*

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

- I. *Goal 10: Reduced Inequality within and Among Countries*
- II. *Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities- Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*
- III. *Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions- Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*

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

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

***Shouldering Global Responsibility for attainment of Global Commons:*** Many efforts at global, continental, regional and national levels have been made to avoid other world wars and instability that characterised most of the Cold war era. Such collective efforts included, as indicated above:

- *Developing legally binding treaties and conventions;*



- *Establishing global governance institutions and international criminal justice institutions such as the International Criminal Court*
- *Developing global partnerships and making international commitments to advance agenda for change to protect the future of humanity as evinced by Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals*

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

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

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

### **What is to be Done? The normative role of Parliaments**

With this depressing state of global affairs- the two main questions that arise are: what is to be done? And where are Parliaments? In particular, what is the Role of Parliaments in Fighting Intolerance, Promoting Peaceful Co-existence and Inclusive societies?

Parliaments have an indispensable role to play in changing this depressing state of affairs and in refocusing and redirecting the international community to a right trajectory.

Through their **law-making, oversight and accountability and facilitation of public participation**- parliaments can play a more meaningful role in Fighting Intolerance, Promoting Peaceful Co-existence and Inclusive societies.

As the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs acknowledged back in 2009, the essential role of international organizations, national and local governments, parliaments and civil society groupings in promoting peaceful co-existence and inclusive societies cannot be overlooked.

**Law Making:** engage in transformative law making by repealing old laws that are not consistent with the values and/or ethos of constitutional democracy and those that are stifling or frustrating progress on cross-cutting socio-economic policy issues such as



promoting peaceful co-existence and inclusive societies through, amongst others; social cohesion programmes

**Public Participation-** through facilitating public engagement of multiple stakeholders, especially civil society in legislative processes, parliaments can ensure active participation of all members of society in finding solutions to the

**Transformative Budgeting and Legislative Processes:** parliaments to use their constitutional powers to ensure that they pass government budgets that talk to adequate allocation of resources to social cohesion and social inclusion programmes.

**Focused and Intentional Oversight and Accountability:** in exercising their oversight and accountability duties, parliaments need to pay closer attention to government's implementation of policies and programmes with potential to have amplified impact on attainment of international, continental, regional and national development goals. Through effective monitoring and evaluation systems and processes, Parliaments need to monitor whether governments are utilizing more efficiently the resources allocated for various implementation of various government programmes- more especially social development programmes.

**Robust Resolution Tracking Mechanism and International Instruments:** parliaments need to also have functional resolution tracking mechanisms to ensure that commitments made and decisions taken in international forums such as the World Summit for Social Development are being implemented in order to achieve the goals of the Summit through national action and regional and international cooperation. During the World Summit for Social Development, amongst others, countries committed in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development (1995) to "an improved and strengthened framework for international, regional and sub-regional cooperation for social development, in a spirit of partnership, through the United Nations and other multilateral institutions". Parliaments need to follow up on commitments like these.

**Harness Parliamentary Diplomacy for attainment of developmental outcomes:** parliamentarians need to learn from and collaborate with other parliamentarians on a number of issues including on developing non-binding model laws and in developing global common positions on developmental issues. In addition, they also need to complement, strengthen and positively influence traditional government diplomacy advantageously.

## **Conclusion**

Undoubtedly, parliaments have an indispensable role to play in fighting intolerance, promoting peaceful co-existence and Inclusive societies. Whilst there are many challenges faced by the international community today- there is still hope for a just, equal, peaceful, stable and prosperous world and parliaments have an equally important task of ensuring that the future generations get to live in such a world. And the only way they can do that is to use their constitutional mandates (law-making, oversight and accountability and



public participation) to fight intolerance in all its guise, promote peaceful co-existence and Inclusive societies.



## 10. Parliaments owning their institutional development: *focus group on future parliamentary development through the common principles*

The Common Principles for Support to Parliaments were adopted by the IPU Governing Council in 2014. They have since been endorsed by 146 national parliaments, 9 parliamentary assemblies and 21 partner organizations. At the heart of the Common Principles is the understanding that only parliaments can manage their own development.



As part of its series of activities in the lead-up to the 10th anniversary of the Common Principles, the IPU is organizing a focus group session for members of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments (ASGP). The discussion will address how parliaments can use the Common Principles to take greater control of their institutional development. More specifically, it will:

- *Help inform future products that would be useful to parliaments and their development, and to anticipating and more proactively responding to emerging trends,*
- *Shed further light on how parliaments are applying the Common Principles, en*
- *Explore how parliaments and the IPU can celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Common Principles*

Participants will be invited to consider the following questions:

- *To what extent are MPs and/or staff in your parliament familiar with the Common Principles?*
- *Can you share any good-practice examples of how the Common Principles have been applied in your parliament?*
- *Are there specific mechanisms or procedures in place in your parliament to promote the application of the Common Principles in your work? If so, what are they?*
- *What are the “entry points” where you think the Common Principles can best be integrated in order to promote their use (strategic plans, self-assessments, assessments of new cooperation partners, etc.)?*
- *With the 10th anniversary of the Common Principles meant to set an agenda for the next decade, what would you like to see being done as we mark the occasion, in terms of:*
  - o *Outputs to celebrate the actual anniversary (e.g. a celebratory event or an agenda for action publication)?*



- *Outputs to include in the agenda for the next 10 years of the Common Principles (e.g. products for parliaments on key emerging themes for parliamentary development, such as responding to future trends or maintaining work continuity in crises)?*