

113th IPU Assembly takes stand on natural disasters, migration and development, role of parliament and media and importance of civil society

The 550 parliamentarians from 130 countries who attended the 113th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Geneva from 17 to 19 October 2005 adopted four resolutions, including one on the role of parliamentarians in natural disaster prevention, reconstruction and the protection of vulnerable groups. They expressed their solidarity with the populations and groups that have been affected by natural disasters, in particular the victims of the devastating earthquake that rocked South Asia on 8 October.

The elected representatives at the Assembly considered that it was necessary to put in place an effective international disaster reduction strategy and to make steadfast efforts to facilitate rescue, relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities in post-disaster situations.

The legislators who met in Geneva urged all Member Parliaments of the IPU and the relevant international organizations to consider establishing databases of human and material resources that are available to countries to effectively deal with natural disasters, and called upon “parliaments to urge their governments to build capacity through the establishment of early warning systems, setting up evacuation centres and disaster prevention measures to facilitate quick and efficient disaster reporting mechanisms”.

Impartial information and terrorism

In Geneva those who represented both the IPU Member Parliaments and the world's parliamentary community – some 40,000 elected representatives – also drew attention to the role of parliament and the media in ensuring that the public has access to “impartial, accurate and verifiable information”.

In a resolution adopted unanimously, the IPU Members recalled the need to combat international terrorism, described as a “danger to the social and political stability of States”, and to conclude a convention including a definition of terrorism.

Recalling that no cause can justify the use of terrorism – a crime against humanity – the parliamentarians underscored the crucial role parliament plays in adopting the necessary laws to prevent and avoid not only armed conflicts and terrorism, but also to ensure cooperation among parliaments at the international level in this area.

How is it possible to foster impartial, accurate and verifiable media coverage of armed conflict and terrorism while limiting the gains uninhibited coverage may provide to terrorists? The 113th Assembly of the IPU called on parliaments to examine the question “in consultation with the media fraternity” and to take appropriate legislative measures. The IPU Resolution reiterates the role of the media and freedom of the press – “one of the pillars of democracy” and its role in democratic life, but underscores that freedom of the press is not “an absolute right that can justify inciting hatred, racism, xenophobia and the violation of human rights”.

The IPU Assembly invited parliamentarians the world over "to ensure that governments fulfilled their duty to disseminate impartial, accurate and verifiable information about incidents involving terrorism and armed conflicts".

Migration and development

The 113th Assembly also adopted a resolution urging governments, in cooperation with the international community, to reinvigorate their efforts aimed at achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), thus contributing to the elimination of conditions that force people to migrate, such as poverty, the negative impact of human activities on the environment, the failure to apply international law, the continued existence of agricultural subsidies, the lack of official development assistance, and the deficit of good governance and the rule of law.

The resolution invites parliaments to support the drafting and implementation of "migration policies that address circular and transnational migratory movements, so as to ensure that the financial, human and social capital gained abroad benefits the home country".

The participants at the 113th Assembly called upon parliaments "to ensure that migration policies are coordinated at the national level, between the relevant ministries and other government bodies and agencies" and invited "governments to address, with the assistance of the international community, the issue of the migration of skilled workers from developing countries (the brain drain) in view of its impact on prospects for achieving the MDGs, especially those relating to health and education, and to explore the possibility – both bilaterally and multilaterally – of establishing mechanisms for financial compensation or for development aid".

The problems faced by the migrant population at the global level have three dimensions, namely: a political one, which recognizes such groups as minorities entitled to the rights of expression and participation; an economic one, whereby their contribution to the growth of receiving economies is acknowledged; and a cultural one, whereby they contribute to the creation of new patterns of socialization and expression.

The importance of civil society

The 113th IPU Assembly also reflected on the importance of civil society and of other democratically elected assemblies that contribute not only to the eradication of poverty, but also empower even the poorest of the poor to engage in general democratic life in their respective countries and, in so doing, enhance the richness and credibility of political representation and strengthen the legitimacy of democratic institutions and processes. It called on parliaments to assist the efforts of NGOs to intensify the fight against poverty so that all people can have practical opportunities to participate in the development of civil society.

The IPU resolution considers that the full affirmation of political and social pluralism can ensure the enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms for all citizens. It calls on parliaments and governments to promote constructive interplay with their respective civil societies, with a view to optimizing the participatory character of their

democracies, inter alia through the effective use of information technology and by bridging the digital divide between regions, and through the involvement of civil society organizations in gender-sensitive budgeting processes. The resolution also urges them to implement projects to facilitate public participation and education for youth.

New IPU Members

During the 113th Assembly, the Governing Council of the IPU reaffiliated the parliaments of the Dominican Republic and Madagascar, and affiliated the parliament of the Maldives. It also suspended the parliament of Mauritania.

Human rights in Eritrea

The Governing Council also approved the report of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, which inter alia included a case involving parliamentarians arrested in Eritrea for publishing an open letter calling for democratic reform through peaceful and legal means. They have not been seen since their arrest, and no charges have been brought against them. Faced with such a situation, the Committee, like the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, concluded that the parliamentarians' basic rights have been seriously violated, and called for their immediate release. (The Committee's public report can be obtained from the IPU Secretariat).

Established in 1889 and with its Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, the IPU, the oldest multilateral political organization, currently brings together 143 affiliated parliaments and seven associated regional assemblies. It has an Office in New York which acts as its Permanent Observer at the United Nations.

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