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Cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/7 of 28 October 1997, in which the Assembly noted with appreciation the increased cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and recommended that that cooperation be further strengthened, at a time when the United Nations was preparing to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

2. By the same resolution, the Assembly decided to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-third session the item entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union", and requested the Secretary-General to submit a further report to the Assembly at that session on various aspects of cooperation between the two organizations in implementation of the cooperation agreement concluded by them in 1996 (see A/51/402, annex).

II. Cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter- Parliamentary Union

3. Cooperation between the United Nations and IPU has been further strengthened since the Secretary-General submitted his most recent report (A/52/456) and the past year has seen several examples where the two organizations undertake joint and mutually reinforcing action. This development has been significantly facilitated and assisted by the opening of the IPU Liaison Office with the United Nations in New York in March 1998.

4. As part of its action to provide parliamentary support to the work of the United Nations, IPU is planning a conference of speakers of national parliaments in the year 2000. This welcome initiative is intended to be held in conjunction with and provide parliamentary support to the proposed Millennium Assembly to be convened by the United Nations in September 2000.

5. The period under review also saw a strengthening of the cooperation between IPU and organizations of the United Nations system, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific

and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). With regard to the latter two organizations, with whom IPU concluded formal agreements of cooperation in the first half of 1997, IPU contributed to their respective General Conferences. As regards ILO, discussions have been initiated towards the conclusion of a formal agreement of cooperation.

6. The Secretary-General welcomes the developments outlined in the preceding paragraphs as a means of ensuring strengthened collaboration between IPU, the United Nations and the organizations of the United Nations system.

A. Promotion of peace and security

Prevention of conflicts

7. At the IPU Conference held in Windhoek in April 1998, IPU expressed support for the United Nations in a resolution on the prevention of conflicts and the restoration of peace in war-torn countries. The Conference called for support to be provided to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his efforts to reform and strengthen the mechanisms of the United Nations that deal with conflict prevention and early warning. The resolution also contained important recommendations for the protection of and assistance to refugees and on the strengthening of democratic processes. At the Conference, IPU also discussed and adopted a resolution on the situation then prevailing in Kosovo, in which it expressed support for Security Council resolution 1160 (1998) of 31 March 1998 and made recommendations for measures to ensure a lasting and peaceful solution to the crisis. The Secretary-General was represented at the Conference by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

Cyprus

8. The Union expressed its continued support to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his mission of good offices to secure settlement of the Cyprus problem. At its Conference held at Windhoek in April 1998, IPU strongly urged the European Union to continue to strive to involve the Turkish Cypriot community in the accession negotiations on the basis of the United Nations framework for the settlement of the Cyprus issue, and reiterated that progress towards a politically negotiated settlement is linked to progress on military issues. Further, IPU has continued to advocate and promote contacts at the level of political parties and at all levels of civil society as an important element in bridging the existing gaps.

Security and cooperation in the Mediterranean

9. Sustained action to promote security and cooperation in the Mediterranean has been pursued by IPU. In June 1998, IPU held a specialized meeting on facilitating access to information and cultural exchanges in the Mediterranean, which is also one of the issues covered by the General Assembly of the United Nations. The meeting was part of the preparations currently under way for a third IPU conference on all the issues covered by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean.

Anti-personnel mines

10. The Union has also continued its campaign to provide support to United Nations efforts to secure a worldwide ban on anti-personnel mines. It provided parliamentary presence and support at the Treaty Signing Conference and Mine Action Forum held at Ottawa from 2 to 4 December 1997 and, at its Conference held at Windhoek in April 1998, IPU called for the earliest possible entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Construction and the adoption of the requisite national legislation and regulations to secure full respect for its provisions. A global parliamentary inquiry on action to that effect is under way.

B. Promotion of representative democracy

11. The promotion of representative democracy is an area in which IPU has developed considerable expertise through its permanent programmes. It is a field where it works particularly closely with the United Nations.

Normative action

12. Taking stock of its experience in promoting democracy, IPU in 1997 concluded a study on democracy, its principles and achievements, and subsequently prepared and adopted the Universal Declaration on Democracy (see A/52/437, annex IV). The Declaration, which sets out the basic principles of democracy, the elements and standards for the exercise of democratic government and the international dimension of democracy, was part of the contribution by IPU to the debate in the General Assembly on support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies, following the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies on Democracy and Development, held at Bucharest, from 2 to 4 September 1997.

Institution-building

13. At the national level, the United Nations has been receiving considerable support from IPU in the provision of advisory services and technical assistance to parliaments. Sometimes, this activity is carried out in the context of a peacekeeping mission as part of international efforts to resolve a conflict situation. In other instances, support is provided at the direct request of the Parliament concerned or the United Nations resident coordinator. The Union is currently implementing projects otherwise seeking to extend such support to national parliaments in Burundi, China, Ethiopia, Fiji, the Gambia, Haiti, Kyrgyzstan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malawi, Mauritania, Rwanda, Viet Nam and Yemen.

14. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works closely with IPU as part of its promotion of their mutual objective of good governance. The Union often provides technical assistance and other support to UNDP projects aimed at assisting parliaments. In April 1998, UNDP and IPU worked together at a meeting of presidents and senior parliamentary leaders from African parliaments, which took place at Harare. The subject of the meeting was the contributions that parliaments can make to democracy in Africa and the mechanisms for strengthening inter-parliamentary cooperation on the continent. The United Nations Development Programme and IPU are planning to conclude in the near future arrangements for a multi-year parliamentary support programme that will considerably expand cooperation in four areas: technical assistance for parliaments, promoting partnership between men and women in political life, promoting inter-parliamentary cooperation, and providing guidelines for assistance to parliaments based on an evaluation of past experience.

15. An Asia-Pacific regional conference of parliaments and the media, to be held at Ayutthaya, Thailand, in March 1999, will be organized by UNESCO and the Thai Parliament and sponsored by IPU. The aim of the conference is to bring together legislators and the media of the Asia-Pacific region to discuss a partnership between them in promoting a culture of peace.

Gender issues

16. One of the core components of the work of IPU to promote representative democracy is its action in favour of partnership between men and women in society in general and in political life in particular.

17. In close coordination with the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic

and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, IPU is currently collecting data on national measures to give effect to the Beijing Platform for Action,¹ with special reference to women's participation in the political decision-making process. A tripartite meeting of representatives of parliaments, Governments and international organizations is planned on the occasion of the special session of the General Assembly to be held in June 2000, as a means of generating increased synergy in following up the commitments made by States at Beijing. The process will also be fed by the outcome of a vast series of interviews of women politicians throughout the world, carried out by IPU with the support of UNESCO and leading, in December 1999, to an event to be jointly convened by the United Nations, UNESCO and IPU, at which an equal number of male and female representatives of Governments and parliaments and of various sectors of society will study the input and impact of women on the democratic process.

18. The Union further continued to extend support to the United Nations with a view to securing the universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women² and the lifting of any reservations limiting its effect, and the adoption of the requisite legislation and regulations to secure respect for its provisions. At its Conference held at Windhoek in April 1998, IPU took special action to secure the presentation to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women of timely and detailed national reports on the implementation of the Convention. The Inter-Parliamentary Council also called upon the members of the parliaments of those States parties which had entered reservations to the Convention to enquire about their validity with a view to their being lifted, and expressed support for the adoption of an optional protocol to the Convention and the introduction of measures which would allow its entry into force as soon as possible. The Union submitted a statement relating to these actions to the Committee at its nineteenth session, held from 22 June to 10 July 1998. In order to assist in the implementation of these actions, the Committee designated one of its members as a focal point for liaison with IPU.

19. At the instigation of IPU, a substantive paper on the human rights of women in the international legal framework was prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat for the 100th IPU Conference, held at Moscow from 6 to 12 September 1998.

20. As in previous years, IPU also contributed to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women, as well as to the work on gender issues of the Commission on Human Rights and the Economic and Social Council.

Human rights

21. The Union and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights have established close cooperation in the context of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The purpose which guided both organizations has been to encourage the stronger involvement of parliaments throughout the world in the promotion and protection of human rights, which may produce tangible results at the national level and stimulate international cooperation in this area. At the urging of IPU, many parliaments around the world have participated in special events, held hearings or debates on human rights issues in special plenary sittings and several of them reported on increased budgetary allocations for human rights. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and IPU are preparing to follow up on these activities with a comprehensive programme to provide parliamentary support for human rights into the twenty-first century.

22. At its 161st session, held at Cairo on 16 September 1997, the Inter-Parliamentary Council adopted, without a vote, a comprehensive resolution on the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The resolution outlines future-oriented practical action to be undertaken by parliaments. It underscores that all States have a duty to seek, in cooperation with the United Nations, universal respect for and observance of all human rights, and reaffirms that human rights are a matter of legitimate international concern. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Secretary-General of IPU addressed a letter to all parliaments of the world, encouraging the implementation of the resolution.

23. The 100th Inter-Parliamentary Conference held at Moscow from 6 to 12 September 1998 had, as one of the two major topics on its agenda, "Strong action by national parliaments in the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to ensure the promotion and protection of all human rights in the twenty-first century". The Inter-Parliamentary Council adopted a resolution, with the same title, in which it expressed full support for the work of the United Nations system. The purpose of the Conference was, *inter alia*, to review the results of the implementation of the resolution adopted at Cairo. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and IPU will cooperate in the follow-up to the Moscow Conference.

24. During the period under review, IPU continued its support to the various human rights mechanisms by, for example, contributing to the work of the Commission on Human Rights and its Subcommission on Prevention of

Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, to the human rights segment of the Economic and Social Council and to the work of specific United Nations working groups and special rapporteurs dealing with human rights questions.

25. The Union also extended support to the International Conference for the Establishment of an International Criminal Court, where it called for a court that would be an efficient and effective tool for the defence of the rule of law all over the world. At the 100th Inter-Parliamentary Conference, the Council adopted a resolution urging the early signature and ratification of the Statute of the International Criminal Court by all States which had not already done so and recommending the parliaments of those States to work actively towards that end.

C. Sustainable economic and social development

26. The Inter-Parliamentary Union continued to provide strong and concrete support to the major international conferences or summit conferences organized by the United Nations to address issues relating to sustainable economic and social development.

27. Within the framework of the cooperation agreement signed with FAO, and as a follow-up to the Parliamentarian's Day held in Rome on 16 November 1996 during the World Food Summit convened by FAO, IPU organized the convening of a specialized inter-parliamentary conference on the issue of attaining objectives of the World Food Summit through a sustainable development strategy. The conference will take place in Rome, from 29 November to 2 December 1998. As part of its cooperation with IPU, UNESCO will also take part in the conference.

28. Following its participation in the special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, IPU adopted a declaration on declining official development assistance and financial aid in general, in which it made recommendations relating to the adoption of strategies which are aimed at improving the performance of development assistance and restoring donors of official development assistance.

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

29. The Union provided support to the follow-up of the World Summit for Social Development. At its Conference held at Windhoek in April 1998, the Inter-Parliamentary Council adopted a political declaration on the need to give substance to the social development commitments undertaken

at the World Summit. It also decided to undertake a review of parliamentary action to implement the results of the Summit. Further, it proposed that IPU organize, together with the United Nations, a tripartite meeting of representatives of parliaments, Governments and intergovernmental organizations to review the progress made since the convening of the World Summit.

HIV/AIDS

30. At its Conference held at Windhoek, IPU expressed support for the United Nations in a debate and resolution on action to combat HIV/AIDS. In the resolution, IPU reaffirmed the principles set out in the World AIDS Strategy, which were endorsed by the General Assembly, and called for parliamentary action to support a variety of efforts to combat HIV/AIDS. The resolution also foresees a closer future working relationship between the United Nations Programme on Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome and IPU, particularly with regard to the provision of parliamentary support for the development of legal standards in this field.

III. Concluding remarks

31. The Secretary-General is encouraged by the increased cooperation between IPU and the United Nations and looks forward to the continued collaboration between the two organizations with a view to finding ways to address the complex challenges of a new globalized era.

Notes

¹ *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

² General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex.