Parliamentary **Assembly**
Assemblee parlementaire

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Parliamentary dimension of the United Nations

Report
Political Affairs Committee
Rapporteur: Mrs Tana de Zulueta, Socialist Group

Summary

Despite wide acknowledgement that the United Nations (UN) should be reformed, reaching an agreement on the shape of this reform is proving to be a difficult and laborious task. In parallel, events such as the war in Iraq and the 'food-for-oil' scandal have eroded confidence in the UN multilateral system and the credibility of the Organisation.

At this crucial moment, the Parliamentary Assembly calls for renewed impetus in the continuation of the UN reform process. A durable and forward-looking reform should be led by the objective of rendering the whole of the UN system more transparent, legitimate and accountable to its member states as well as public opinion at large. For this reason, the reform cannot be limited to making the Organisation more reflective of current geopolitical realities but should aim at incorporating democratic mechanisms into the UN system, with a view to redressing the democratic deficit in global governance and bridging the distance between the UN and the people.

The closer involvement of parliamentarians in UN activities could be a fundamental means to associate the people – through their elected representatives – to the UN deliberative process, the oversight of UN activities and the monitoring of the implementation of UN decisions by member states. This involvement should be enhanced progressively: it should start by ensuring that parliamentarians are fully informed of UN activities, culminating with the inclusion in the UN system of a parliamentary assembly with consultative functions.

I. Draft resolution

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its Resolutions 1289 (2002) on Parliamentary scrutiny of international institutions and 1373 (2004) on Strengthening of the United Nations.

2. Despite wide acknowledgement that the United Nations (UN) should be reformed, reaching an agreement on the shape of this reform is proving to be a difficult and laborious task. Results can be noticed in some areas, such as the decision to set up a Peacebuilding Commission as well as a Human Rights Council. The general thrust of the reforms, however, is far from being outlined while negotiations on some important aspects, such as those relating to the enlarged representativity of the Security Council, seem to have reached a deadlock. In parallel, events such as the war in Iraq and the "food-for-oil" scandal have eroded confidence in the UN multilateral system and the credibility of the Organisation.

3. At this crucial moment, the Parliamentary Assembly calls for a renewed impetus in the continuation of the UN reform process. In its view, a durable and forward-looking reform should be led by the objective of rendering the whole United Nations system more transparent, legitimate and accountable, before its member states as well as public opinion at large. For this reason, the reform cannot be limited to making the Organisation more reflective of current geopolitical realities but should aim at incorporating democratic mechanisms in the UN system, with a view to redressing the democratic deficit in global governance and bridging the distance between the United Nations and the people.

4. In this context, the Assembly believes that the issue of the closer involvement of parliamentarians in UN activities should be brought to the forefront of current reform discussions as it is a fundamental means to associate the people – through their elected representatives – to the UN deliberative process, the oversight of UN activities and the monitoring of the implementation of UN decisions by member states.

5. Parliamentary involvement in the work of the UN should be enhanced progressively. This process should begin by ensuring that parliamentarians are fully informed of UN activities and culminate with the inclusion in the UN system of a parliamentary assembly with consultative functions.

6. The Assembly takes note of the recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations–Civil Society Relations – the so-called *Cardoso report* – concerning the engagement of parliamentarians in UN work and welcomes the growing association of parliamentarians with the UN activities, in the form of a strengthened co-operation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

7. This strengthened co-operation is welcome as it improves the familiarity of national parliamentarians with UN activities and provides them with a podium in UN instances. The Assembly, however, believes that in order to have a lasting impact on the legitimacy, accountability and representativity of the United Nations system, the involvement of parliamentarians in UN work should be further developed so as to become systematic and structurally linked with the functioning of UN institutions. In particular, given its deliberative and oversight functions as well as its role as the most representative global forum, the UN General Assembly is ideally placed to act as an interface to parliamentarians.

8. A decisive step towards the development of a UN parliamentary dimension could be the exploratory establishment of a parliamentary committee with consultative functions for General Assembly committees. It would be composed of national delegations, elected by national parliaments, with due respect to the principle of representativity of the political forces present in parliament and with due consideration to gender balance. This parliamentary committee should be of reasonable size, and should ensure a fair geographical representation of all the regional groupings currently existing in the General Assembly. Within each regional grouping, national delegations would rotate on a periodic basis. Should this experiment be successful, its structure and functioning could inspire the establishment of a UN parliamentary assembly, with consultative functions for the plenary General Assembly.

9. In light of the above, the Assembly urges Council of Europe member and observer states to:

9.1. encourage debates over issues discussed at the UN in national parliaments as well as in regional parliamentary assemblies;

9.2. allow the active participation of parliamentarians in national delegations to the General Assembly.

10. In addition, the Assembly invites the UN Secretary-General to give further consideration to the recommendations of the *Cardoso report* concerning the engagement of parliamentarians and suggest proposals along the same lines.

11. Finally, the Assembly invites the UN General Assembly to:

11.1. envisage appropriate ways for involving parliamentarians in its activities by:

11.1.1. working with the IPU and other inter-parliamentary representative bodies, devising a step-by-step strategy which could include the following stages:

11.1.1.1. setting up a network of regional parliamentary assemblies to discuss emerging UN priorities, with consultative functions for one or more General Assembly committees;

11.1.1.2. setting up a parliamentary committee to discuss issues of special global or regional importance and/or the UN budget, with consultative functions for one or more General Assembly committees;

11.1.1.3. setting up a UN parliamentary assembly, based on national delegations, with consultative functions for the General Assembly;

11.1.2. adopting clear rules for the involvement of parliamentarians in its work, setting out their rights and responsibilities as well as the obligation, for parliamentary delegations, to ensure a fair representation of the political parties or groups in their parliament and give due account to gender balance considerations;

11.1.3. setting up a panel to make precise proposals on the recommended size, composition and rota system of parliamentary committees and/or a UN parliamentary assembly;

11.2. consider additional measures to ensure better interaction between the General Assembly and national or regional parliaments, including involving the Speakers or Presidents of these assemblies more actively in the work of the regional groupings of the General Assembly.

II. Explanatory memorandum by Mrs de Zulueta

1. Introduction

1. In 1945, representatives of 50 countries met in San Francisco to discuss proposals for the creation of a global multilateral institution dedicated to preserving peace and building a better world. On 25 June, the delegates gathered in full session for the last meeting. Rather than voting on the final document by a show of hands, every delegate rose and remained standing to signify approval. So did all those who were present, be they staff, press or one of the 3000 visitors. In this way, the Charter of the United Nations was approved by a unanimous standing ovation.

2. Sixty years later, it is apparent that the United Nations is going through a critical phase. Whereas all Member States agree that a broad-ranging reform is needed, negotiations are at a stand-still, especially as far as the reform of the Security Council is concerned. In parallel, events such as the war in Iraq and the "food-for-oil" scandal have further eroded the confidence in the UN multilateral system as well as the credibility of the Organisation.

3. Rather than a standing ovation, if a vote on the United Nations was called today, it would meet with a cooler response: both the effectiveness of the Organisation in responding to collective threats and its accountability have been put in question. This disaffection for the United Nations overlooks the fact that in the last decade and a half, the Organisation has been more successful than ever in achieving its goal of *'saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war'*: the number of democracies has grown, interstate conflicts have become increasingly rare and less deadly, and the number of internal conflicts is decreasing. As it has recently been pointed out[1], this unnoticed success is to be ascribed to the United Nations, in particular to the substantial growth in UN-led peace-keeping operations as well as in peace-building and conflict prevention activities.

4. Over the spanning of sixty years, the world has changed substantially, and not only in terms of new threats or challenges to security: democracy has spread to a growing number of countries, has put deep roots in national institutions and has affected the way in which people and civil society hold their governments accountable for delivering what they promise.

5. These developments, however, have been mostly limited to the national level: regrettably, the increasing power of international institutions and their growing impact over the lives of millions of people has not been compensated by the introduction of suitable mechanisms to ensure transparency of decision-making and accountability.

6. The United Nations is not free of this democratic deficit: '*We the peoples of the United Nations'* begins the Preamble of the UN Charter; and yet these peoples and their elected representatives are very distant from UN institutions; are hardly aware of the issues being debated and decided at UN level; and have hardly any means of participating in this debate or in the decision-making process, nor of scrutinising the implementation of UN decisions. The 'democratic' character of the General Assembly has had little impact on the overall activities of the Organisation, given the loss of prestige of this institution and the preponderance that the Security Council has come to exercise in the framework of the UN institutional balance.

7. The present report calls for the introduction of a parliamentary dimension in the UN system as a way to increase the legitimacy, accountability, representativity of the Organisation and redress its democratic deficit. This proposal is not new: it has been reiterated by the Assembly in a number of texts, including Resolutions 1289 (2002) on Parliamentary scrutiny of international institutions and 1373 (2004) on Strengthening of the United Nations.

8. It is, however, a proposal which needs to be explained, motivated and promoted in relevant national and international *fora*, because so far it has not received attentive consideration: with the ongoing debate on UN reform concentrating on the Security Council, the introduction of a parliamentary dimension in the UN system is often considered as a secondary or even marginal and theoretical aspect. Besides, several models for a closer association of parliamentarians are being proposed, and sufficient thought may not have been given to the pros and cons of each of them. This

[1] Andrew Mack, The Human Security Report, War and Peace in the 21st Century, Human Security Centre, University of British Columbia, June 2005.

debate is made more complicated by concerns that the introduction of a parliamentary dimension might provoke an alteration of the UN institutional balance and/or might place hurdles to the effectiveness of the UN decision-making process.

9. In my report I shall try to clarify the state of the debate and respond to these objections, which I do not consider to be well-founded. In my opinion, the issue of the parliamentary dimension of the United Nations must be brought to the forefront of the debate on UN reform, as a fundamental element to ensure the legitimacy of the Organisation in the eyes of the world public opinion for years to come. What the UN needs is not only to adapt its structures and their composition to the new geopolitical reality, but a courageous and forward-looking reform to introduce stronger democratic mechanisms, to restore the UN in its intended role as the legitimate protagonist of global governance.

10. To prepare this report, I met representatives of other international organisations, UN officials and public figures and I take this opportunity to thank them. In particular, I should like to recall my exchanges of views with Mrs Louise Fréchette, UN Deputy Secretary-General, Ambassador Paul Heinbecker, Mr Anders Johnsson, Secretary-General of the IPU and Mr Lambsdorff, member of the European Parliament. Two recent gatherings that helped me in my reflections were the Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (New York, 7-9 September 2005) and the meeting of the Political Affairs Committee in Ottawa, organised in co-operation with the Canadian Observer Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (23-25 October 2005).

2. Current involvement of parliamentarians in UN work

11. At the moment, the direct participation of parliamentarians in the activities of UN institutions does not happen on a stable and structured basis and is limited to the General Assembly. In fact, this participation is a matter falling within the discretion of national delegations which may decide, according to the issues on the agenda, to include members of their national parliaments.

12. At national level, the involvement of parliamentarians in issues concerning the UN rests on domestic legislation and practice. In general, it can be said that parliamentarians are involved in the process of deciding on the financial contributions to the United Nations or on other important issues such as the participation of troops in UN peace-keeping operations. There is no systematic oversight of UN activities, or follow-up on the implementation of its decisions.

13. Even if there is no systematic, structured and general involvement of national parliamentarians in the work of the UN, in recent years a growing parliamentary involvement in UN work can be observed, even if limited to some thematic issues, more often on an *ad hoc* basis and with various degrees of organisation. This ‘involvement’ – which is still far from being an interaction – is fostered and mediated by parliamentary organisations or networks.

14. The most comprehensive example of this trend is provided by the **Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)**, the world organisation of parliaments of sovereign states, comprising 143 member parliaments and 7 associated members. This is an international organisation, with a permanent secretariat and headquarters, which aims to act as the focal point for world-wide parliamentary dialogue.

15. Recently, the IPU has intensified its co-operation with the United Nations and since 2002 has held observer status with the General Assembly. IPU resolutions and declarations can be circulated in the General Assembly, thus making it possible for it to give a political contribution to the work of the Assembly and its subsidiary bodies. Besides, the IPU holds regular parliamentary hearings at the United Nations, as well as other specialised gatherings on the occasion of United Nations regular meetings and *ad hoc* international conferences.

16. Furthermore, the IPU and the UN – including its specialised agencies - work together to advance specific issues through joint activities, publications and meetings, on issues such democracy and human rights, women's issues, child protection, HIV/AIDS, trade and sustainable development. The latest example of this co-operation is an IPU-UNHCR handbook for parliamentarians on statelessness and nationality, which aims at raising awareness among parliamentarians on these issues.

17. Another recent interesting attempt to associate more closely parliamentarians to UN activities is the **Parliamentary Network for Nuclear Disarmament (PNND)**[2], a global network of parliamentarians from more than 40 countries working to prevent nuclear proliferation and achieve nuclear disarmament. PNND is a programme of the Global Security Institute[3], a US-based think-tank founded by US Senator Alan Cranston. Through the network, parliamentarians exchange information on nuclear disarmament issues, relevant national legislation and international events including United Nations disarmament meetings.

18. As an example of PNND activities, I shall mention that last October, together with the anti-nuclear network Mayors for Peace[4], it presented a joint nuclear disarmament statement to the President of the General Assembly and the Chair of the GA Disarmament Committee, which was distributed to all the permanent representatives to the United Nations, with a view to influencing the start of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament negotiations.

3. Existing proposals for increased parliamentary involvement

19. As I said in the introduction, several models for the establishment of a closer association of parliamentarians in UN work are being proposed. Before proceeding to the analysis of the most significant ones, I should like to clarify that there is general acceptance that national parliamentarians should be better involved in UN issues, at least in terms of information. Having said that, existing proposals vary as to how to create this closer involvement. On one end of the spectrum, there is the proposal to establish a new body, a UN parliamentary dimension; on the other, the proposal to make better use of existing structures for parliamentary co-operation.

20. **The Inter-Parliamentary Union**, for instance, reckons that *'the time for the idea of a UN parliamentary dimension has not come yet and that there may be no need for it provided that parliaments and the IPU work more closely with the United Nations'*.[5]

21. In its view, there is no need to create a new body: more meaningful and structured interaction between parliaments and the United Nations is necessary but must take place through the daily work of national parliaments; at the international level, instead, the IPU, as the world association of parliaments, is the natural parliamentary counterpart of the United Nations.

22. I would like to quote an extract from the Opening statement by the newly-elected President of the IPU, Pierferdinando Casini, delivered at the IPU Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations (New York, 31 October 2005): *'Over the last year many parliaments have discussed how best to organize cooperation with the United Nations. We have concluded that, while we perform our constitutional role at home to represent the will of the people, this includes a clear responsibility in relation to the multitude of international negotiations that take place in multilateral forums. We want to make sure that we are well informed of these negotiations, that we have an opportunity to debate what is being negotiated, that we can question ministers and that we can influence the negotiating positions they are advancing on behalf of our people. And once negotiations have concluded, it is for us to ratify agreements and see to their implementation. That involves adopting or amending legislation, it involves voting budgets and, of course, it involves holding governments to account in implementation. We also reaffirm that parliaments should increase their international work in partnership with the IPU. We are not in support of the creation of new parliamentary structures at the United Nations or elsewhere. Instead, we want the IPU to mobilize expertise, which exists in parliamentary standing and select committees, and to work on issues on the international agenda. We want the IPU to facilitate the provision of more and better information to national parliaments on the activities of the United Nations. We want the IPU to stage more parliamentary hearings like this one and specialized meetings at the United Nations. And we want the IPU to cooperate more closely with official regional parliamentary assemblies and organizations.'*

[2] http://www.gsinstitute.org/pnnd/index.html .
[3] http://www.gsinstitute.org/gsi/index.html .
[4] http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/mayors/english/ .
[5] Speech by A.B. Johnsson, A Parliamentary Dimension to International Cooperation, 3 March 2003.

23. The **European Parliament** has a different position. In fact, it has launched the idea of setting up, in cooperation with world or regional parliamentary assemblies – including the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly and the OSCE Assembly - a network of parliamentarians to act as a Consultative Parliamentary Assembly under the United Nations[6].

24. Its most recent text on this matter calls for the *'establishment of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA) within the UN system, which would increase the democratic profile and internal democratic process of the organization and allow world civil society to be directly associated in the decision-making process'.* This Parliamentary Assembly should *'be vested with genuine rights of information, participation and control, and should be able to adopt recommendations directed at the UN General Assembly'.*[7]

25. Proposals for a closer parliamentary involvement do not originate only from outside the UN: in June 2004, the **Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations – Civil Society Relations**, chaired by former Brazilian President Cardoso, submitted its report to the UN Secretary-General. In response to the observed democratic deficit in global governance and the rising power of global public opinion, the so-called *Cardoso report* put forward detailed recommendations for engaging elected representatives in UN work, as part of the civil society (*see Appendix*)[8].

26. Apart from nothing that it is inappropriate to describe elected representatives with legislative responsibilities and power of oversight of the executive simply as 'civil society', I would like to highlight some of the most interesting proposals:

- the involvement of parliamentarians should be linked with the General Assembly and the deliberative process;
- this involvement should be systematic;
- it should take place at national level through the holding of debates on the UN or on relevant issues for the UN;
- it should also take place at international level: a) through the inclusion of parliamentarians in national delegations to the General Assembly; b) through the invitation of members of parliament specialising in a subject to address relevant Committees or Assembly sessions; c) by setting up, on an experimental basis, 'global public policy committees';
- the 'global public policy committees' should be composed of 30 parliamentarians and be regionally representative. Parliaments would be invited through their Speakers to select two to four members, representing the party balance in parliament;
- finally, to advance the foregoing strategy, an Elected Representatives Liaison Unit should be created.

27. During my recent visit to the UN Headquarters, I felt that these courageous and forward-looking proposals had not found sufficient hearing. In his report 'In larger freedom', the Secretary-General did not include any specific recommendations concerning the involvement of parliamentarians. In his report on the implementation of the Cardoso report, instead, he devoted only one paragraph to commend the proposals of the Panel to the consideration of the Assembly and mentioned HIV/AIDS as a topic for a possible gathering including parliamentarians which, with experience, could evolve into the global public policy committees.

4. What form for the increased involvement of parliamentarians: current trend

28. From my exchange of views with relevant actors, I formed a clear impression that among the approaches described above, the one proposed by the IPU is gaining ground.

29. The Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments, for instance, has adopted a Declaration encouraging the role of the IPU as the parliamentary counterpart of the United Nations. More specifically, the Conference has invited the IPU to *'avail itself more frequently of the expertise of members of standing and select committees of national parliaments in dealing with specific issues*

[6] European Parliament resolution on the relations between the European Union and the United Nations (2004), paragraph 39.
[7] EP Resolution on the reform of the United Nations, 6 June 2005.
[8] Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations – Civil Society Relations, 11 June 2004 (Proposals 13-18).

requiring international cooperation; (…) to develop further parliamentary hearings and specialised meetings at the United Nations, and to cooperate more closely with official regional parliamentary assemblies and organizations, with a view to enhancing coherence and efficiency in global and inter-regional parliamentary cooperation'.

30. Confirming that this is the path being followed, the **2005 World Summit Outcome** contains a paragraph devoted to 'cooperation between the United Nations and parliaments', which reads: *'We call for strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and national and regional parliaments, in particular through the Inter-Parliamentary Union, with a view to furthering all aspects of the Millennium Declaration in all fields of the work of the United Nations and ensuring the effective implementation of United Nations reform'.*[9]

31. Without implying any criticism of the IPU as an organisation, and after discussing the matter with its Secretary General, I have doubts as to the suitability of the IPU approach as an exhaustive response to the issue of the involvement of parliamentarians in the UN system. The IPU approach, in fact,

- does not envisage any structured or systematic involvement of parliamentarians in UN work;
- does not aim at linking parliamentarians to the functioning of UN institutions and bodies but rather at providing parliamentarians with a podium in UN instances ;
- does not provide sufficient clarity as to how parliamentarians will be elected or selected;
- tends to consider parliamentarians as 'experts', while in my opinion their main 'asset' is their political mandate;
- finally, as the Cardoso report points out, *'not all parliaments accept that they are represented by the IPU, and some are still not members of the organization'.*

32. My concern is that this sort of approach – if considered as exhaustive – would have a very limited impact on the United Nations system in terms of increased legitimacy, democratisation and accountability of the Organisation. It is, however, extremely valuable if it is considered as an intermediate step in a process leading to a UN parliamentary dimension because it is bound to enhance the familiarity of national parliamentarians with UN work.

5. My proposal

33. I am convinced that the involvement of parliamentarians in UN work could be instrumental in:

- reducing the democratic deficit in global governance;
- reinforcing the legitimacy of the work of the United Nations and the transparency of its decision-making process;
- increasing the interest in UN work among national parliaments and public opinion at large;
- improving the monitoring of the implementation of UN decisions by national parliaments and, in general, the accountability of Member States for their respect of UN texts.

34. To achieve these aims, in addition to enhancing the interest of national parliaments in UN activities, I am in favour of creating a parliamentary dimension, whose involvement in UN work should meet certain requirements.

35. First of all, it should be **systematic**. Far from implying that it should cover all the spectrum of UN activities, this means that there should not be no element of arbitrariness as to when and if parliamentarians can have their voice heard within the UN system. Rather then occasional events in UN premises with the participation of UN officials, there should be an recognised place for parliamentarians, and issues should be identified on which their opinion should be heard.

36. Among the UN institutions, the **General Assembly** seems to me the privileged instance for parliamentary involvement. The reason is twofold: from the point of views of its composition and voting method, the Assembly is the most democratic and universal body in the UN system, where every State has one vote. Its legitimacy would be highly enhanced if a manner was devised to ensure that not only governments are represented in this body, but also elected representatives of the peoples of the United Nations. Secondly, the Assembly unites wide-ranging deliberative and oversight functions which could greatly benefit from enhanced transparency, democratic oversight and follow-up. I am thinking, for instance, of its resolutions on peace and security; of its work in promoting international

[9] A/60/L1, 20 September 2005, para. 171.

political co-operation, the development and codification of international law, or the realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms and rights for all. As far as oversight functions are concerned, the Assembly not only considers reports from the Security Council and other organs but also approves the budget and apportions the contributions among members. It is obvious that the association of parliamentarians with these functions would help reduce the democratic deficit in global governance, would make the United Nations more accountable for their work and its governments answerable as to how they implement UN decisions. The involvement of national parliamentarians in the work of the General Assembly 5th Committee (administrative and budgetary), for instance, would be the obvious equivalent of the role played by national parliaments and would increase parliamentarians' awareness on the way in which national contributions to the UN budget are used.

37. In order to contribute to improving the legitimacy and accountability of the United Nations, parliamentary involvement should be consistent with **democratic, transparent and pluralist principles**. This is to say that there should be clear rules as to the way in which national parliamentarians are to be elected or selected to work with the General Assembly and that delegations should be representative of the political forces present in parliament and give due consideration to gender balance. I consider this point of the utmost importance because a 'parliamentary dimension' that only reflects the majority in parliament risks being *de facto* a duplication of the General Assembly, where sit government representatives. Besides, in my view, the best guarantee of legitimacy for 'parliamentary delegations' is that they are elected by parliaments themselves.

38. I am aware that the involvement of parliamentarians in the UN system is not easy to realise in a short time frame. There are several ways, however, in which this could be done, and a **step-by-step approach** can be envisaged.

39. For instance, it would be possible to establish:

- a network of parliamentarians, which could meet on a regular basis as a consultative body under the United Nations, to discuss major political issues;
- a network of regional parliamentary assemblies (such at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Pan-African Parliament, the Latin-American Parliament, etc.) with similar functions;
- parliamentary committees, acting within the General Assembly or its subsidiary bodies, to discuss emerging UN priorities and possibly budgetary issues. These committees could comprise parliamentarians from the relevant committees in their national parliaments or in regional parliamentary assemblies;
- a consultative UN parliamentary assembly, composed by national delegations as well as delegations of regional parliamentary assemblies.

40. I find that the idea of **pilot projects** put forward in the Cardoso report should be further considered. For instance, on an experimental basis, national parliamentarians could be associated with the work of the General Assembly 5th Committee, through the creation of a parliamentary committee with consultative functions. Should be this experiment prove to be successful, the same model could be extended to the activities of other Committees and, in time, to the General Assembly as a whole.

41. Along the lines of the Cardoso report, this parliamentary committee should be of reasonable size – for instance 30 members - and should ensure a fair geographical representation of all the regional groupings currently existing in the General Assembly. Within each regional grouping, national delegations would rotate on a periodic basis.

42. Other measures to ensure better interaction between the General Assembly and national or regional parliaments could be:

- involving the Speakers or Presidents of these assemblies more actively in the work of the regional groupings of the General Assembly;
- stimulating debates over issues discussed at the UN in national parliaments as well as in regional parliamentary assemblies. This would also enable parliamentarians to have a better understanding of UN priorities and be more aware of how national financial contributions to the UN are employed;
- increasing the participation of parliamentarians in national delegations in the General Assembly, provided that they are given the possibility of taking the floor and that the above-mentioned criteria of representativity are ensured. Despite supporting it, I must say, now that

the debate around a UN parliamentary dimension has taken more vigour, I see the limits of this specific proposal, as it may engender confusion between the roles played by representatives of the executive and of the legislative power, as well as create an imbalance between delegations who admit parliamentarians and those who do not. It is, however, the easiest proposal to implement, and certainly a step in the right direction.

43. I must admit that some of the objections raised against the introduction of a UN parliamentary dimension puzzle me. It has been argued, for instance, that it would undermine the efficiency of the decision-making process: it is as if – as legislators and elected representatives – we were to step back from our democratic functions, leaving governments the sole power of decision.

44. I have also been surprised to hear that the introduction of a parliamentary dimension would cause institutional confusion, as the United Nations is an intergovernmental organisation. This approach is out of step with current trends: most existing regional intergovernmental organisations have a parliamentary dimension (the OSCE, NATO, the Nordic Council, the CIS, the African Union, the Organization of American States, etc.). At global level, there is an ongoing debate on the introduction of a parliamentary dimension at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and our Assembly has already stated its favour for this proposal. In my opinion, the fact that an organisation is intergovernmental should pose no obstacle to the presence of a parliamentary dimension as demonstrated by the positive role played by the Parliamentary Assembly in the context of the institutional balance of the Council of Europe.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

45. As it could be foreseen, reaching an agreement on the shape of UN reforms is proving to be a difficult and laborious task. Results can be noticed in some areas, such as the decision taken by the 2005 World Summit to set up a Peacebuilding Commission and a Human Rights Council while in other areas, such as the reform of the Security Council, no substantial progress was made.

46. It is to be expected that in the course of such complex negotiations and debates, some issues should take precedence, others polarise attention while others may fade into the background. We should not lose sight, however, of the overall picture and of this Assembly's vision for a United Nations as an organisation adequately equipped to preserve peace and security in the 21st century.

47. The proposal to introduce a parliamentary dimension to the UN system would contribute to redressing the Organisation's democratic deficit and filling the gap between UN institutions and the public opinion at large. It would offer us an opportunity to shape a strengthened, transparent, legitimate and, last but not least, democratic United Nations. It is natural that parliamentarians should be the first to support this idea, and should engage in promoting it both in their parliaments and abroad, through parliamentary diplomacy. I invite, therefore, the members of the oldest European parliamentary institution to vote in favour of my text and to continue to support the vision which underlies it in appropriate *fora*.

APPENDIX

Extract from the 'Cardoso report'[10]

VI. Engaging with elected representatives

101. The Panel is of the view that enhancing United Nations relations with actors beyond its formal membership will help to address the democracy deficits in global governance that are in evidence today, which will entail engaging more strategically with those having representational mandates, such as parliamentarians and local authorities.

Engage parliamentarians more systematically in the work of the United Nations

102. The Panel suggests that enhanced United Nations-parliamentarian relations could contribute greatly to closing the democracy deficit in global governance. It proposes a four-pronged strategy:
• Take United Nations issues to national parliaments more systematically
• Ensure that parliamentarians coming to United Nations events have more strategic roles at those events
• Link parliaments themselves with the international deliberative processes
• Provide an institutional home in the United Nations for engaging parliamentarians

Take United Nations issues to national parliaments more systematically

103. National parliaments are the most important arenas for policy debate, legislation, financing public programmes and holding Governments to account. International affairs are an important aspect of Governments' executive power but are usually a weak aspect of parliamentary processes. Governments frequently agree to major global commitments following scant if any discussion in their national parliaments. And there is little parliamentary scrutiny of whether the Government is honouring or ignoring those commitments. So global goals of immense importance, such as the Millennium Development Goals, are subject to little attention in most parliaments, greatly reducing their potency.

104. The Panel proposes that the United Nations systematically encourage national parliaments to devote much more attention to intergovernmental processes, particularly scrutinizing government management of United Nations affairs and follow-up actions to honour global agreements. Different avenues should be tested with the help of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and associations of parliamentarians. Progress depends on the provision of parliaments with all documents on upcoming United Nations matters when they are sent to Member States, which is the practice of the European Commission. The speakers of parliaments would decide, according to their laws and procedures, how to use the documents, including which parliamentary committee to refer them to.

Proposal 13
The United Nations should routinely encourage national parliaments to hold debates on major matters coming up in the United Nations and to discuss those matters with the relevant ministers. Relevant documents, including those on progress achieved on the Millennium Development Goals and other globally agreed goals, should be made available to parliaments when they are transmitted to Governments. The Secretary-General should seek the cooperation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and associations of parliamentarians. Member States should regularly consult members of parliament on United Nations matters and debrief them after major United Nations meetings.

Ensure that parliamentarians coming to United Nations events have more strategic roles

105. Many members of parliament attend United Nations meetings, usually as members of government delegations. More purposeful debates targeted at parliamentarians held in parallel to the United Nations meetings could be explored. For example, if the General Assembly were reformed to focus on a smaller number of pressing issues, a debate among members of parliament in advance of

[10] Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations – Civil Society Relations, 11 June 2004 (Proposals 13-18).

relevant Assembly sessions might widen the policy options considered and serve as a conduit for public opinion on those topics. The members of parliament would be encouraged to follow up the debate in their national parliaments.

Proposal 14
Member States should more regularly include members of parliament in their delegations to major United Nations meetings, while taking care to avoid compromising their independence. The Secretariat should test opportunities for members of parliament to contribute as parliamentarians, including in debates before a General Assembly meeting on a major topic. Members of parliament specializing in a subject could also be invited to speak in relevant committees and special sessions of the Assembly, particularly when they are reviewing progress achieved in meeting the Millennium Development Goals and other agreed global goals.

Link parliaments with the international deliberative processes

106. Given that national parliaments are formal and powerful institutions of democracy, the Panel considers it important to link them more structurally with the international intergovernmental process and to explore international parliamentary mechanisms to do so.

107. At the national level, functional committees — sometimes called “standing” or “select” committees — are powerful mechanisms for ensuring the separation of powers. They prepare legislation and propose policies, budget allocations and accountability processes. At the national level, they take evidence from ministers, officials, civil society organizations, companies, academics and others. They are effective because of their formal status. They can subpoena witnesses, their members are selected by their parties and appointed or elected by the plenary or parliament, their composition reflects the party balance in the parliament, and they serve for several years, building up substantial expertise. Moreover, Governments and the media respect them.

108. A frequent weakness of such committees is that their purview is national policy while the topics they address are global. The Panel thus proposes experimental global public policy committees to test ways of bringing a global dimension to the mechanism.

109. Such committees should comprise up to 30 parliaments and be regionally representative. An initial approach might be to invite countries serving on the General Committee of the General Assembly to participate. This would ensure that all regions and the five permanent members of the Security Council were included.

Rotation of membership is desirable, perhaps with five-year terms. Parliaments would be invited through their speakers to select two to four members to represent the party balance in the parliament. The first global public policy committee could be convened for three to four days to enable substantial debate and time for hearing evidence from internationally relevant specialists from civil society, academia, governmental agencies, the private sector and others.

110. The Secretariat — with the relevant specialized agency and in consultation with IPU and other specialist organizations — would propose the agenda for initial meetings and could help to service them. In time, the global public policy committees would develop its own mechanism to set agendas relevant to the global deliberative processes. The funding and secretariat functions of the committees would come as much as possible from the participating parliaments, but the Secretariat should explore donor support for the participation of members of parliament from developing countries.

111. As with their national counterparts, the global public policy committees would forward policy proposals and scrutinize progress on past agreements (by intergovernmental organizations and Governments). They would submit reports to the Secretary-General and heads of relevant specialized agencies for transmission to their intergovernmental forums. They would also issue press statements to widen public understanding of the issues, and members would report to their national parliaments.

112. The approach permits incremental change guided by periodic reviews. The initial global public policy committees might be informal and advisory, with a somewhat ad hoc group of countries. Later they might be more formal, eventually leading to globally representative committees on all global priorities, with the right to submit policy recommendations and progress audits to the United Nations and Member States.

113. The global public policy committees would fill a gap in public engagement in global processes now that the age of the big United Nations conferences is largely over. They would help to connect national democracy with global processes, closing democratic deficits in global governance. They would also provide global platforms for the most qualified politicians and conduits for the experience, expertise and policy advice of the most qualified civil society actors. Their profile would make them global agenda-setters and educators.

Proposal 15
Member States should make way for an enhanced role for parliamentarians in global governance. They should instruct the Secretariat to work with national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as appropriate, to convene one or more experimental global public policy committees to discuss emerging priorities on the global agenda.
These committees would comprise parliamentarians from the most relevant functional committee in a globally representative range of countries. In an experimental five-year period, different organizational arrangements could be tested and, through periodic review, refined over time.

Provide an institutional home in the United Nations for engaging parliamentarians

114. To advance the foregoing strategies, the Panel suggests that it is timely for the United Nations to create a modest Elected Representatives Liaison Unit (see below and sect. VIII), akin to the well-respected Non-Governmental Liaison Service. The Unit would ideally serve a liaison function for the organizations of the United Nations system as well as the United Nations itself. It would have direct contact with parliaments, but would emphasize a "wholesaling" approach to reaching parliamentarians, working through IPU and associations of parliamentarians. The Unit's functions would include an information service for members of parliament, making available as early as possible draft documents from the intergovernmental process and progress reports on global commitments. This would entail a dedicated web site for members of parliament on matters related to the United Nations. It would suggest topics for parliamentary debate, linked to the intergovernmental agenda, and endeavour to connect parliaments, for example to encourage coordinated debates.

115. The Panel recognizes that some of its proposals are untested, particularly the global public policy committee mechanism, and so it suggests a five-year experimental period to test different mechanisms, guided by periodic reviews. The proposed Elected Representatives Liaison Unit would guide this process, disseminating lessons learned from innovations throughout the system and fostering system-wide debate about strategy in this area. The Unit should also monitor relevant proposals from within and outside the United Nations, ensuring that the United Nations is apprised of ideas that appear to be gaining currency.

116. The Panel recognizes that the United Nations has a special relationship with IPU; hence it suggests that its proposals be seen as opportunities to build on that relationship. In particular, the proposed global public policy committees, while convened by the United Nations, could offer IPU partnership opportunities. IPU has repositioned itself in recent years as an organization of parliaments rather than of parliamentarians. But not all parliaments accept that they are represented by IPU, and some are still not members of the organization. Where parliaments prefer their contacts with the United Nations to be brokered through IPU, the United Nations should respect this preference. It is suggested that when a parliament has been so instructed by its presiding officer, the United Nations work through IPU to achieve the above strategy, although it is stressed that the integrity of the global public policy committee mechanism will be assured only if all parliaments are engaged in an equivalent way.

Proposal 16
The Secretary-General should form a small Elected Representatives Liaison Unit:
•To provide a dedicated information service for parliaments and associations of parliamentarians, including a dedicated web-based information service for members of parliament
• To encourage greater attention to United Nations processes in national parliaments
• To help to create more effective opportunities for members of parliament to take part in United Nations forums
• To organize global public policy committees to work closely with national parliaments, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, specialized agencies and other organizations as appropriate
• To foster debate within the United Nations system about new or improved strategies for engaging parliaments and parliamentarians

Recognize the special contributions of local authorities and others

117. Local authorities have been playing a growing role in both United Nations policy debates and in achieving global goals; they are a key constituency for the United Nations, but they are not non-governmental. A particular area of growth has been the networking among cities and towns across regions and countries focused on specific issues. In the area of climate change and the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, coordinated decisions and actions by cities have challenged the position of Member States opposed to the Protocol. Because local authorities are elected, their policy positions carry weight and are indicators of public sentiment. As a result of its consultations with mayors, the Panel proposes that the General Assembly be urged to adopt a resolution affirming and respecting the principle of local autonomy to underscore the growing importance of this constituency.

Proposal 17
The General Assembly should debate a resolution affirming and respecting local autonomy as a universal principle.

118. Efforts have been made to include local authorities in various processes, such as those of the Commission on Sustainable Development (through the major groups concept adopted by Governments at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992) and of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) (through the partners concept introduced by the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, held in Istanbul in 1996). The latter created an advisory body of local governments to advise the Executive Director and, through that office, the Commission on Human Settlements. In May 2004 a new world association of local authorities was launched — United Cities and Local Governments. Given the representiveness of that body, which unifies previous international associations, the Panel considers this will be an important conduit for representing people at the local level in the system of global governance. Thus, the Panel suggests that the United Nations explore with this body ways in which they can engage most productively with each other and that the United Nations consider it as an advisory body to the Secretary-General and the General Assembly on matters of international governance, not only urban development issues, because local governments run both urban towns and rural villages.

119. The Panel is of the view that establishing an Elected Representatives Liaison Unit would help the United Nations to engage with that sector (see also proposal 24). The Unit could work closely with UN-Habitat and other United Nations agencies whose work relates to local governments. The Unit would collect and disseminate information about the efforts of local governments to implement globally agreed goals, highlight and disseminate best practices their work has generated, periodically report on the contributions of local authorities to United Nations processes and support country-level dialogue between local and central government authorities.

Proposal 18
The Elected Representatives Liaison Unit (see proposal 16) should liaise with local authorities and their new world association and disseminate lessons of good practice. The United Nations should regard United Cities and Local Governments as an advisory body on governance matters. The Secretary-General should require United Nations bodies with a national presence to build close contacts with local authorities and their national and regional associations. Specifically, resident coordinators should interact regularly with local authorities to inform them of United Nations programmes and processes and to encourage partnerships with them.

Reporting Committee: Political Affairs Committee.

Reference to Committee: Order 582 (2002), 25.06.02

Draft Recommendation unanimously adopted by the Committee on 14 December 2005

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