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Translating international human rights commitments into national realities: The contribution of parliaments to the work of the United Nations Human Rights Council



CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES
ROMANIA

Seminar for parliaments from Central and Eastern Europe organized jointly by the Chamber of Deputies of the Romanian Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

17-18 February 2014 - Bucharest (Romania)
Palace of the Parliament, Nicolae Bălcescu Hall

PROGRAMME

Monday

17 February 2014

8.00 a.m.

Registration

9.00 a.m.

Opening session - Address by Mr. László Borbély, Chairperson of the Committee for Foreign Policy of the Chamber of Deputies, Rapporteur of the Seminar

Welcoming remarks addressed by:

- **Mr. Valeriu Ștefan Zgonea**, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Parliament of Romania
- **Ms. Navi Pillay**, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - video message
- **Mr. Razvan Rusu**, Director, Regional Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Romania)
- **Mr. Anders B. Johnsson**, Secretary General, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

10.00 a.m.

Session I: Common human rights challenges in Central and Eastern Europe as identified by the Human Rights Council

Although the Council adopts specific recommendations for each country, some human rights issues appear to be more frequently mentioned than others in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations for countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

This session will examine how States in the region, with the help of parliaments, have been able to address some of these issues. In so doing, the session will focus in particular on promoting the rights of minorities and the proper administration of justice.

- **Moderator: Mr. Michal Sewerynski**, Member of the Sejm, Chairman of the Committee on Human Rights, the Rule of Law and Petitions, Senate (Poland)

Speakers:

- **Ms. Beatriz Balbin**, Deputy Director, Office for Democracy Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR)

Debate

11.15 a.m.

Coffee break

11.30 a.m.

Session II: The role of parliaments in protecting human rights at the national level

Parliaments' powers to adopt legislation, oversee government action and adopt the national budget are critical in promoting human rights. Several parliaments, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, have set up specific committees devoted to human rights in order to do this effectively.

This session will address the following main questions: "How effectively have parliaments exercised their legislative, oversight and budgetary powers to promote human rights", and "What differences have parliamentary human rights committees made to this end"?

- **Moderator: Ms. Rozalia-Ibolya Biró**, Chairperson of the Committee on Human Rights, Cults and Minorities, Senate of Romania

Speakers:

- **Ms. Herta Däubler-Gmelin**, Consultant, former MP (Germany)
- **Mr. Rogier Huizenga**, Manager, Human Rights Program (IPU)

Debate



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- 12:15 p.m. **Press Conference** (*Spiru Haret* Hall - Palace of the Parliament)
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- 1 p.m. *Lunch offered by Mr. Valeriu Ștefan Zgonea, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of Romania (Palace of the Parliament, "Receptions" Saloon)*
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- 2.45 p.m. **Session III: Introduction to the Universal Periodic Review and parliamentary contribution to its functioning**
- This session aims to present the work and objectives of the Council and its UPR and how it relates to other United Nations human rights mechanisms, in particular the UN treaty bodies and special procedures. The session will also look at some lessons to be learned from the first and second UPR cycles.
- Without parliamentary action - be it passing laws or overseeing government action - very few UPR recommendations would actually be implemented. Parliaments can play a critical role in the implementation phase and beyond. They can also discuss the draft national report of the UPR process before it is presented to the Council, and take part in its official presentation to the Council.*
- This session will thus look at parliaments' contribution to the different stages of the UPR process.
- **Moderator: Ms. Melita Mulic**, Member of the Committee on Human and National Minority Rights (Croatia)
- Speakers:**
- **Ms. Ljiljana Stancic**, Human Rights Officer, Universal Periodic Review Branch, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
 - **Mr. Roland Chauville**, Executive Director, UPR Info
- Debate**
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- 4.30 p.m. *Coffee break*
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- 4.45 p.m. **Session IV: Parliaments' contribution to the work of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): A shining example of strong parliamentary involvement**
- The UN Committee supervising implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has a very similar reporting procedure to that of the Council's UPR. For several years now, parliaments and the CEDAW Committee, with the assistance of the IPU, have been cooperating to help ensure that CEDAW is effectively implemented at the national level.*
- This session will look at the lessons to be learned from the CEDAW experience to enhance parliaments' contribution to the UPR.
- **Moderator: Ms. Rodica Nassar**, Chairperson of the Committee on Health and Family, Chamber of Deputies (Romania)
- Speakers:**
- **Ms. Victoria Popescu**, Former member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Romania)
 - **Ms. Michèle André**, Senator, Executive President of the French IPU Group, Substitute Member of the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians (France)
- Debate**
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- 6 p.m. *Wrap-up session*
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- 7 p.m. *Dinner offered by Mr. László Borbély, Chairperson of the Committee for Foreign Policy of the Chamber of Deputies, Parliament of Romania (Marriott Hotel)*
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Tuesday
18 February 2014

9.30 a.m.

Session V: National case studies of involvement in the UPR

The executive - often together with national human rights institutions - is in the driver's seat in preparing the UPR reporting cycle and ensuring implementation of its recommendations. Parliaments are often largely unaware of and uninvolved in the UPR process, although this is slowly changing.

This session will look at two interesting national case studies of how the UPR report was prepared and how the UPR recommendations have been implemented. It will examine in particular the involvement of parliament in the process and its interaction with other human rights stakeholders.

- **Moderator: Mr. Petru Filip**, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Senate of Romania

Speakers:

- **Romania: Ms. Oana Rogoveanu**, Head of the Human Rights Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- **Croatia: Ms. Melita Mulic**, MP, Member of the Committee on Human and National Minority Rights

Debate

10.45 a.m.

Coffee break

11 a.m.

Session VI: What place for human rights in the post-2015 development agenda?

States are negotiating a new set of goals to replace the Millennium Development Goals when they expire in 2015. A new generation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will need to be agreed for all countries so as to galvanize action on the economic, social and environmental priorities of our time. Several voices in the international human rights community are pressing for human rights principles to be at the heart of the SDGs. By embedding the goals in existing international human rights conventions, the idea is to make their implementation mandatory, rather than voluntary, and to facilitate the participation of all sectors of society in formulating and implementing them.

This session will address the on-going discussions about the SDGs, the benefits and implications of grounding them in existing human rights treaties, and the steps that parliaments can take to help achieve this.

- **Mr. Rogier Huizenga**, Manager, Human Rights Program (IPU)

Speaker:

- **Mr. Savio Carvalho**, Amnesty International, London

Debate

12.15 p.m.

Summing up by Mr. László Borbély, Chairperson of the Committee for Foreign Policy of the Chamber of Deputies, Rapporteur of the Seminar

12.30 p.m.

 Closing session of the seminar ■

12.45 p.m.

Lunch hosted by Ms. Rozalia-Ibolya Biró, Chairperson of the Committee for Human Rights, Cults and Minorities, and Mr. Petru Filip, Chairperson of the Committee for Foreign Policy, Senate of Romania (Palace of the Parliament, Rustic Restaurant)

13.45 p.m.

Sightseeing tour (optional)

 Visit of the Royal Palace
