



125 years of democratic struggle for peace

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Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.



THE FUTURE

BEGINS...

...WITH THE

DECISIONS

WE MAKE

IN THE

PRESENT.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union: yesterday, today and tomorrow

A space for dialogue open to all national parliaments

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has always been unique, its long history epitomized by the quest for peace through dialogue.

It was conceived from the beginning as an open forum, a place where parliamentarians from different countries and different political parties could meet and exchange views. The resulting political diversity is what sets the Organization apart.

Unconstrained by ministerial protocol, Members can talk freely with their colleagues and seek the means to resolve bilateral differences. IPU has often shown that dialogue is possible, even between two countries in conflict. Recognized for its impartiality, it has proved that it is possible to outline a shared vision of the future that parliamentarians of all persuasions can support.

Initially led by European parliamentarians, IPU has gradually expanded to become a truly global organization in which parliaments of every continent are represented on an equal footing. With 164 Members in 2014, IPU is still growing, reflecting the global demand for democracy.

The Organization's values have also matured. Although its purpose in 1889 was peace through dialogue, its mission has since grown with the awareness that democracy, based on principles such as equality between men and women and respect for human rights, is the best guarantee of peace and well-being.

IPU is today the organization that most closely reflects world public opinion. Its legitimacy derives, as it has from its creation, from the participation of elected representatives of the people and from the global scope of its membership.

IPU is proof that it's possible to outline
a shared vision of the future that politicians
of all persuasions can support.
© Reuters / N. Doce, 2012

Inventing multilateral cooperation

A major contributor to the development of international law

Before the United Nations (UN), before the League of Nations, there was the Inter-Parliamentary Union. With growing tension between States at the end of the 19th century, visionary parliamentarians came together to seek peaceful responses to issues of international security.

Through IPU's creation, parliamentarians entered the realm of diplomacy with a revolutionary concept: multilateralism. Together, these parliamentarians demonstrated that war and the dynamics of power need not be the natural situation in international relations. For the first time, an organization with the explicit remit of finding negotiated solutions to political problems had come into being.

IPU made its presence on international politics felt rapidly. Members helped organize the international peace conferences in The Hague in 1899 and 1907. They laid the groundwork for the international law we know today. The Permanent Court of Arbitration was created in 1899 based

on principles that still form the *raison d'être* for many international judicial institutions today, including the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

World War I marked a setback for IPU's efforts but also provided a dramatic rationale for the establishment of an international organization to help keep the peace. Discussions within IPU were directly instrumental in creating the League of Nations in 1919.

From its inception, IPU has functioned as a laboratory of ideas for new forms of global governance. It works today to form a bridge between national parliaments and the UN and to democratize international relations.

Swiss President Guisepppe Motta addresses the first assembly of the League of Nations in Geneva in 1920, in whose creation IPU had played a key part.
© United Nations at Geneva





Facilitating political dialogue

Discourse as a solution and source of hope

At the end of the 19th century, France and UK were far from being allies. The strong participation of British and French parliamentarians in IPU's creation and the personal relationships of trust that grew out of that process were crucial in paving the way for the Entente Cordiale of 1904.

After World War I, IPU was the first international organization to bring former enemies together, thereby contributing to Franco-German reconciliation.

During the 1970s and 1980s, IPU played a vital role in the process of détente in Europe. Many of the conclusions of the Parliamentary Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975, such as the recognition of the rights of

women and national minorities and the condemnation of all forms of terrorism, went considerably further than those agreed by diplomats.

IPU's activities have also had an impact on conflicts within countries. For example, when elections in Kenya sparked conflict in 2008, IPU brought together parliamentarians from the leading political parties. It provided space for them to establish ties through dialogue and settle disputes without recourse to violence. Such political dialogue continues today in the Maldives, Burundi, Sierra Leone and many other countries.

Only political dialogue can produce decisions acceptable to all and create the conditions for lasting peace. Since its creation, IPU has shown that dialogue is the best weapon in the quest for peace.

PM Margaret Thatcher thanked the British Group of IPU for its organization of future Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to UK, which led to their holding "constructive" talks.
© Reuters / STR New, 1984

Promoting democratic institutions

Human progress is interdependent with democracy

As the number of elected parliaments grew after World War I, IPU increasingly mirrored the state of democracy in the world.

Its growing diversity was a source of vigorous debate as well as controversy. In 1924, with the rise of fascism, that debate focused on a crisis in the parliamentary system. IPU became the first international body to discuss and seek solutions. However, the increasingly divergent views expressed prevented IPU from adopting a common position on the political system best adapted to peace and progress.

The Cold War effectively froze the debate on political systems for decades thereafter. Given the stalemate, IPU turned its attention to developing expertise in parliamentary working methods, creating the International Centre for Parliamentary Documentation in 1966. The Organization became a centre of excellence in parliamentary institutional knowledge.

This expertise, channelled through IPU's technical cooperation programme, has benefited more than 70 parliaments since the 1970s. This has enabled IPU Members to share the know-how of their parliamentarians and officials with those of other parliaments and so support the building of modern parliamentary institutions.

Priority is given to parliaments of countries in transition or emerging from conflict, such as Myanmar or Egypt. But access to IPU support is open to any parliament wishing to improve how it functions, including on gender equality and human rights, in countries as different as Bangladesh, Oman and Peru.

The promotion of democracy and of parliaments has over time become a central part of IPU's mission.





EL VOTO ES LIBRE Y SECRETO

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Setting standards for democratic parliaments

Parliaments as engines of democracy

A parliament has two basic functions: to legislate and to hold government to account. However, it took many years for IPU to start developing more precise standards and guidelines for democratic parliaments.

After the end of the Cold War, the experience gained from its work to build parliamentary capacity during the 1970s and 1980s provided the basis for developing such standards and guidelines. It was a time when newly-formed countries were creating new institutions and trying to apply the good practices developed by others.

IPU first took on the role of defining standards and the guidelines on meeting them in 1994, with its Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections. It continued three years later with the Universal Declaration on Democracy,

making IPU the first international entity to define democracy, both as an ideal and goal of society and as a system of government. The Declaration underscored that democracy is based on everyone's right to take part in the management of public affairs and aimed to preserve and promote the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual.

In 2006, IPU published "*Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century: a guide to good practice*". Based on the experience of Member parliaments, the guide identified the criteria for a democratic parliament as being: representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective. This analysis was another milestone in effectively evaluating the progress made and the steps still required to strengthen democracy through parliaments. IPU has also created a self-assessment tool for parliamentary performance, developed the concept of gender-sensitive parliaments and formulated indicators of parliamentary performance.

Making gender equality a reality

Participation in political and organizational life

IPU's evolution on gender equality has been remarkable. If at first it largely mirrored the slow global progress of women in politics, the Organization eventually took the lead as an advocate for equality in politics. The story of IPU support for gender equality is one of innovation, courage and genuine commitment.

The 1921 IPU Conference in Stockholm was the first to welcome women delegates, accounting for one per cent of participants. Today, women average 30 per cent of IPU Assembly delegates.

As early as the 1920s, women delegates argued that all issues discussed at IPU conferences – from disarmament to drug trafficking – required every voice to be heard.

In the 1960s, women parliamentarians condemned discrimination and advocated equal rights for women. In 1975, IPU adopted a resolution on the issue. The creation of a gender partnership programme to support women nationally followed.

Since the 1970s, IPU data on the number of women in parliament has been a unique source of information for policy-makers and campaigners on gender equality, often bringing real change.

The institutionalization in 1985 of the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians was another ground-breaker. In 2004, IPU became the first international organisation to adapt its statutes to ensure women were represented in all decision-making organs and national delegations, subject to sanctions. The adoption of a Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments in 2013 has given direction to IPU's and parliaments' work for the years ahead.

Within IPU, it is now widely accepted that all political issues concern both genders. Addressing them democratically requires a spirit of equality and cooperation. Gender equality and democracy go hand in hand.

[Tunisian parliamentarians celebrate together after adopting a new Constitution, three years after the uprising that kick-started the "Arab Spring". © Reuters / Z. Souissi, 2014](#)





The defence of human rights

Protecting the guardians of democracy

Freedom of expression is at the heart of democracy and fundamental to parliament. To stand up for the rights of their citizens, the rights of parliamentarians must be guaranteed.

Yet, in many countries, parliamentarians critical of the authorities are considered a threat and made to pay a high price for exercising their freedom of speech. Assassinations, attacks and death threats targeting parliamentarians are more prevalent than thought. So are instances of arbitrary arrest and detention, often as part of politically motivated proceedings with no prospect of a fair trial.

To protect against such abuses, IPU established a Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians in 1976.

By focusing only on parliamentarians, the Committee is unique. It adheres to the principle of parliamentary solidarity: “what happens to you today may happen to me

tomorrow”. Parliamentarians everywhere are, therefore, asked to help their counterparts in need.

No case is closed without a satisfactory solution. That persistence has paid off. Ten years after the 1988 assassination of Honduran Miguel Angel Pavón Salazar, the Committee helped ensure the assassin was identified, arrested, tried and sentenced.

It is but one of many success stories. The Committee has been able to protect and obtain redress for thousands of parliamentarians from across the globe. This can be through their release from detention, the dismissal of politically motivated charges, compensation, investigating abuses, or, effective legal action to prevent impunity for perpetrators.

From only a dozen cases when first set up, the Committee is now working on cases involving nearly 300 parliamentarians. It highlights the on-going violations of parliamentarians’ rights and underscores the need to protect them.

Former Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri was successfully helped by IPU’s Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians when she was an opposition leader. © Reuters / B. Beawiharta, 2009

Driving development forward

Ensure positive democratic change

The debates within IPU on economic and social issues have evolved in parallel with changing circumstances in the world. Nevertheless, there have been several constants within IPU: seeking practical ways to increase international cooperation, developing international law and bringing a democratic dimension to decision-making.

Initially, IPU focused its attention on lowering barriers to trade. Its proposals in the 1920s for a European Customs Union and regional economic agreements foreshadow many of the institutions that have come into being since World War II.

As membership of the Organization grew, the horizons of debates within IPU broadened. In the 1930s, IPU adopted resolutions on the need for “world economic solidarity” and took up the issues of workers’ rights and social protection. By building on its earlier work on international arbitration and the codification of international law, IPU set out a

powerful case for using international commercial arbitration courts as a peaceful means of settling trade disputes.

These concerns are echoed in the modern era. A joint initiative with the European Parliament to create a parliamentary dimension to the World Trade Organization has provided democratic oversight of the rules of global trade since 2002.

Over time, bringing a parliamentary dimension to international affairs has proved critical. A two-way exchange provides a parliamentary voice in international negotiations and engages parliaments on the implementation of international commitments by States through legislation and oversight.

The adoption of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, for example, was facilitated by the political support of Speakers of Parliament. Since then, IPU has worked actively with parliaments to pursue national policies to achieve these goals.

[Sustainable development remains a pressing global challenge in which parliamentarians are playing an increasingly important role. © Reuters / A. Biraj, 2008](#)





Working to achieve peace

A continuous endeavour from IPU's inception to the present

IPU founders Frédéric Passy and William Randal Cremer were active in the international peace movement. What distinguished them was the combination of a passion for arbitration, a pragmatic approach towards international relations and their position as elected members of parliament. Both were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts. Another six IPU leaders would be similarly recognized in later years.

Efforts to promote peace became even more important after the horrors of World War I. In the 1930s, a study commissioned by IPU described how a new war would be more deadly and destructive than any witnessed before, affecting entire societies. These warnings fell on the deaf ears of the authoritarian regimes of the day. As parliamentary systems gave way to dictatorships, IPU's ability to

work for international understanding declined. The Organization faced another deep crisis as the world once more plunged into war.

The notion of peace changed after World War II and focus turned to limiting the risk of an all-out confrontation between superpowers. By bringing together delegations from East and West, IPU became a precursor of détente. It demonstrated that dialogue between the two was possible, while also speaking out in favour of disarmament and peaceful coexistence.

Today, IPU's concept of peace is wider. The link between democracy and conflict prevention and resolution has become a core message backed up by its activities. While IPU's objectives and activities have evolved over the years, its founders' vision of a world without armed conflict still stands at the centre of its work.

Democratic global governance

Bridging the democracy gap in international relations

The idea of establishing a world parliament was on IPU's agenda as early as 1906. By the end of World War I, the notion that global governance matters needed to be overseen by parliamentarians was gaining support. Yet, the League of Nations was based on an inter-governmental model that left no place for parliaments.

After World War II, IPU looked with interest upon the newly emerging UN. In 1947, IPU's relations with the new organization were formalized when granted consultative status with the UN's Economic and Social Council. It developed a direct relationship with the UN Secretary General and senior staff, which endures today. IPU has since developed an extensive programme of activities with the UN and its specialized agencies, programmes and funds.

In 2000, IPU convened the first-ever World Conference of Speakers of Parliament at UN Headquarters on the eve of

the Millennium Summit. In their Declaration, Speakers from almost every parliament set out an ambitious agenda for providing a parliamentary dimension to the UN's work. In the Millennium Declaration adopted after, Heads of State and Government confirmed their desire to see the UN strengthen its cooperation with parliaments through IPU in every field of its work.

Two years later, the UN General Assembly conferred permanent observer status on IPU and in 2005, associated it closely with newly-created UN bodies working on peace-keeping, democracy and human rights. This was later extended to other areas of work.

Today, IPU provides a bridge between national parliaments, States and international organizations. In this role, it plays an innovative and increasingly prominent role in democratizing global governance.

[IPU is a vital bridge between parliaments, States and international organizations on issues of global governance. © IPU, 2012](#)

BACK TO BASICS: CONNECTING POLITICS AND TRADE

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William Randal Cremer and Frédéric Passy,
both winners of the Nobel Peace Prize.
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Our mission

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is the global organization of national parliaments. It works to safeguard peace and drives positive democratic change through political dialogue and concrete action.



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.