



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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206th session of the Governing Council (Extraordinary virtual session) 1–4 November 2020

Executive Committee
Governing Council

EX/284/Inf.1
CL/206/Inf.3
28 October 2020

IPU Secretariat Activities Report Pandemic Period 2020

This report summarizes the activities of the IPU during the pandemic months and provides material for reflection on the IPU's role during and after the COVID-19 crisis. The first version of this report was presented during the 283rd session of the Executive Committee in July 2020. The report has since been updated.

From March to October 2020, the IPU adapted to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and found new ways of delivering on its mandate to empower parliaments and parliamentarians.

Within a few days of the pandemic being declared, the IPU responded with its campaign *Parliaments in a time of pandemic* to support parliaments as they put in place measures to continue to function. Through the campaign, the IPU collated data, expertise and good practice for parliaments to use and share. The campaign was also an opportunity to underline how parliaments are essential in the response to the pandemic and should not be sidelined by emergency government actions.

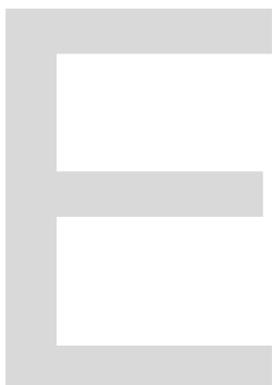
At the same time, the IPU adapted the way it works including by fast-tracking the IT systems and software to enable Secretariat staff to work remotely. As a result, the IPU was still able to deliver business continuity in most of its activities, research and support services for Members, as well as innovate, adapt and find different ways of engaging with the parliamentary community.

This Activities Report outlines the headline Secretariat activities during the past eight months. The report also includes an [Annex I](#) which lists all the IPU virtual events organized during this period as well as planned meetings, and an [Annex II](#) which lists publications and tools produced by the Secretariat during the pandemic period.

1. Parliaments in a time of pandemic

As COVID-19 became a global pandemic, it rapidly became clear that a new type of support to parliaments was needed. This was an opportunity for the IPU to showcase its global credentials, confirm its position as the leading source of information and guidance on parliamentary practice, and facilitate exchanges between its Members.

As a result, within a few days of the lockdown, the IPU launched its communications and information campaign *Parliaments in a time of pandemic* with dedicated branding and a call to action to all its Members to share their responses to the crisis.



Resources developed by the Secretariat for the campaign included:

- A [country-by-country compilation](#) of how parliaments are dealing with the crisis in terms of health measures, legislation, government scrutiny, technology and innovation
- A practical [Q and A on remote working tools and technology](#) for parliaments
- A [guidance note](#) on how parliaments can ensure that government interventions in the COVID-19 crisis take into account a **gender** dimension
- A [guidance note](#) on how parliaments can ensure that government interventions in the COVID-19 crisis are consonant with **human rights**
- A [two-minute video](#) on how parliaments and parliamentarians have responded to the pandemic

The campaign has received global attention in the media and on social media with many requests for interviews from the international press. More than 100 parliaments answered the IPU's call to action and the website saw a [40 to 50 per cent growth](#) in traffic during the pandemic period, compared to the same period last year, with the country compilation page receiving thousands of views.

As well as collating much of the good practice, the IPU Centre for Innovation in Parliament facilitated numerous exchanges between Members on remote working methods and technological solutions.

The IPU also partnered with WHO and UNDRR for a series of webinars between experts and parliamentarians which mobilized hundreds of participants.

The IPU is also finalizing a policy note for parliamentarians entitled "Green approaches to COVID-19 recovery", in partnership with the UN Environment Programme. The IPU Secretary General presented insights from this note at the "Achieving a green and inclusive recovery post COVID-19" session of the 2020 virtual Global Parliamentary Forum at the World Bank and IMF Annual Meetings on 14 October 2020.

The IPU has partnered with the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia Pacific in the organization of a series of regional webinars for parliaments on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in time of a pandemic.

The IPU is currently looking into developing further research to help parliaments manage the post-COVID period and into how the pandemic has affected the functioning of parliaments. This includes a series of consultations of IPU Members on the impact of the pandemic on parliamentary work and capacity.

2. Business continuity

Despite the cancellation of the IPU Assemblies in April and October, the Secretariat has continued to support its Members, moved many meetings and seminars online, prepared relevant documents and continued to conduct its research programmes for parliaments and parliamentarians.

2.1 Supporting the Speakers' Conference and IPU statutory bodies

In the lead-up to the first part of the **Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament**, the Secretariat organized [four](#) virtual sessions of the Preparatory Committee (on 21 April, 13 May, 2 June, [6 and 7 August](#)) to prepare for the Speakers' Conference and the 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament.

A drafting committee was set up which held two virtual meetings to prepare the draft outcome Declaration of the Speakers' Conference, which was circulated to all national parliaments for their feedback and possible amendments.

The Secretariat also organized **five** virtual **Executive Committee** meetings (on 3, 18, 26 June, **9 July**, and **31 August**), to examine pressing matters relating to the IPU budget, programme of work and future meetings.

The Executive Committee decided to establish a working group to make recommendations on the agenda and modalities for a virtual meeting of the IPU Governing Council from 1 to 4 November. The working group met **three** times (on 3 and 16 July, and **13 August**).

The first part of the **Fifth Edition of the World Conference of Speakers of Parliament** took place virtually on 19 and 20 August. For the first time, the conference was organized with a national parliament – the Austrian National Council represented by Speaker Wolfgang Sobotka.

Over 115 of the world's most senior legislators took part in the conference. They were joined by hundreds of other members of parliament, diplomats, scientists and representatives of multilateral organizations to discuss international parliamentary cooperation to address the challenges facing a COVID-19 world.

The conference culminated in a declaration on the overall theme of parliamentary leadership for more effective multilateralism that delivers peace and sustainable development for the people and planet.

The **13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament** took place virtually on 17 and 18 August. It brought together 28 women Speakers of parliament from 26 countries who exchanged their experience of women's parliamentary leadership in a time of COVID-19. They also discussed how to step up equality between men and women, building on the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The **High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism** held a virtual meeting on 4 June, with an agenda which included funding for its programme of work, review of the IPU-UNODC-UNOCT trilateral agreement and an update on the development of new products, such as a mobile application for MPs and an interactive map.

In July, the IPU, UNODC, and UNOCT organized a webinar on model provisions regarding victims of terrorism to strengthen the capacity of national parliaments to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism. Since the IPU High-level Advisory Group meeting in June, the design and development of the mobile application and interactive map, as well as the creation of a global parliamentary network are moving forward.

The **Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians** met virtually on 25 May and examined the cases of 210 MPs out of its current caseload of 488 MPs from 40 countries who have reported human rights violations.

The human rights team conducted extensive follow-up with relevant national authorities, complainants and/or third parties in ongoing and new cases before the Committee in Belarus, Brazil, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Egypt, Guatemala, Iraq, Libya, Maldives, Mongolia, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

The Committee is meeting again virtually from 22 to 30 October.

The IPU **Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law** met virtually on 2 October 2020. It discussed the impact of COVID-19 on refugees, stateless men and women and on the provision of humanitarian assistance more generally.

The Committee agreed on a series of initiatives to raise awareness on measures concerning vulnerable populations such as refugees and stateless men and women. It also discussed strategies to pursue its work in cooperation with the ICRC, and the Global Compact on Refugees, and the statelessness campaign, in cooperation with UNHCR.

The **Committee on Middle East Questions** met virtually on 22 July 2020. The Committee focused on the situations in Palestine and Libya and reviewed communications that had been received by the IPU since October 2019 regarding the Middle East. A representative from Israel attended the Committee meeting for the first time since October 2018.

2.2 Capacity-building for Member Parliaments

In **Botswana**, the IPU gave expert presentations on oversight and e-governance during a webinar induction for new MPs in June 2020. An SDG–gender self-assessment is planned for later in the year.

In **Djibouti**, the IPU provided assistance to the Parliament in crafting legislation on health emergency preparedness which will be considered by Parliament soon. The IPU also supported the National Assembly's elaboration of a practical guide for MPs on procedures and practice related to committee meetings and facilitated an external evaluation of its EU-funded PRAN project. Starting in 2019, this two-year project is designed to strengthen parliament's role in promoting and protecting human rights. So far, it has led to the creation of a parliamentary human rights committee, a women's caucus, as well as greater human rights awareness among MPs. A second two-year cycle is currently being developed to start in 2021.

In **Germany**, the IPU presented its guidelines to prevent sexism and harassment in parliament to a working group of MPs from the Bundestag.

In **Mauritania**, the IPU facilitated two on-line meetings to support women parliamentarians to identify needs and priority actions.

In **Myanmar**, the IPU launched a survey on professional development for MPs as well as training on how to use videoconferencing apps. The IPU conducted two webinars on a COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan attended by over 40 MPs, including MPs from other parliaments. In August, the IPU launched 330 constituency profiles for MPs to help them prepare for the next legislature as well as to support the opening of a parliamentary public document repository.

In **Sierra Leone**, the IPU provided support to the Parliamentary Caucus on Female Genital Mutilation. The Caucus was established as a result of an IPU workshop held in February 2020.

In **Tanzania**, the IPU continued to provide support to women MPs through an ongoing mentorship programme and the development of capacity-building tools.

In **Tunisia**, IPU expert advice helped improve the Parliament's rules of procedure for enhanced oversight.

In **Ukraine**, the IPU gave a webinar presentation to MPs entitled "Guidelines for parliamentary research services" on the occasion of the launch of a Ukrainian version. The IPU was also part of a high-level discussion "Strengthening the role of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in achieving the SDGs" on 22 September.

In **Uzbekistan**, the IPU co-organized, with the Parliament and OHCHR, a webinar for parliamentarians on human rights on 10 June. A second webinar took place on 6 October more specifically on the role of parliament in preventing torture.

In **Vanuatu**, the IPU helped secure a grant of CHF 50,000 for a project to support enhanced data use in parliament, in collaboration with the National Statistics Office of Vanuatu.

In **Zambia**, the IPU organized a discovery exercise with the National Assembly's Research Department to help facilitate future development plans.

In **sub-Saharan Africa**, the IPU organized three webinars in June and July for parliamentary staff on women's, children's and adolescents' health. This was organized together with PMNCH, WHO, Living Goods Uganda and Countdown 2030.

The IPU moved its annual information seminar on the IPU to a virtual format. The seminar, in French, was attended by some 25 staff members representing 16 parliaments.

2.3 Research projects and partnerships

Preparations for two of the IPU's flagship publications – the Global Parliamentary Report and the World e-Parliament report – have continued in recent months. Both publications will incorporate new questions on the COVID-19 pandemic. [One of the case studies in the Global Parliamentary Report on public participation will focus on COVID-19 and parliamentary- public engagement in time of crisis.](#)

Research and interviews with MPs for a future regional study on sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Africa have continued.

[Online consultations with MPs and experts from 23 countries were carried out in view of a forthcoming IPU-UN Women handbook for parliamentarians on making legislation gender-responsive.](#)

The IPU continues its research, in collaboration with the Graduate Institute of Geneva, on the relations between majority and opposition parties in parliament and on how effective political dialogue can be good for democracy and long-term stability. The research is due for completion in December 2020.

[A comparative research paper on parliamentary administration was published in October 2020. The paper shines the spotlight on dimensions of parliamentary autonomy and independence in the governance of parliamentary administration across the globe, from recruitment to budgetary powers.](#)

Over the past few months, the IPU has conducted extensive research on youth participation in parliaments in preparation for a forthcoming report and has updated the IPU's open data platform, Parline. The research also investigates the impact of COVID-19 on youth and how to adapt post-COVID-19 policies to support youth employment, education and health. Lastly, preparations are on-going for the launch of a global campaign to enhance youth representation in parliament, in the context of the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the IPU youth movement.

The IPU has also started working on a paper that will focus on SDGs financing in a time of pandemic.

One significant project which marked the second quarter, was a series of three climate legislation webinars aimed at building the capacity of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, co-organized with UNFCCC and CISDL.

The IPU strengthened its partnerships with Generation Equality Forum and International Gender Champions to promote progress towards gender equality.

The IPU also took part in an expert group meeting on women's political participation convened by UN Women, in preparation for the session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women to be held in 2021.

In September and October, four video statements by the IPU President were presented during the UN 75th anniversary High-Level meetings on 21 September and 26 October, as well as on the specific themes of biodiversity (30 September), Beijing +25 (1 October), and nuclear disarmament (2 October).

In October, the IPU also convened the first in a series of online MP briefings on UN processes with close to 100 parliamentarians joining.

Virtual events and webinars during the pandemic period

Past events

- “Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic: Parliamentary action to reduce risks, strengthen emergency preparedness and increase resilience” (global webinar on 28 April, organized with UNDRR and WHO, attended by over 500 MPs)
- “One planet, one humanity”: Webinar on International Day of Multilateralism (24 April)
- [Four](#) webinars for Myanmar on the Economic Relief Plan, [Challenges and Public Leadership during COVID-19](#), attended by over 80 MPs, and an experience exchange with international MPs (May, June, [August](#), and [September](#))
- Two video parliamentary consultations “Assuring our Common Future: a draft guide to parliamentary action in support of disarmament for security and sustainable development”
- Virtual meeting with members of the human rights committee of the National Assembly of Senegal to explore how the IPU and OHCHR can support their work (28 May)
- Virtual conference (with OHCHR and the Uzbek Parliament) on human rights in Uzbekistan (10 June)
- Launch of parliament e-learning platform; first training course on Committee skills for parliamentary staff in Myanmar (June 2020)
- Virtual briefing with Burkinabe stakeholders on progress in the implementation of recommendations of the UN Human Rights Council for Burkina Faso
- Virtual meetings of two Centre for Innovation in Parliament hubs: parliaments in Southern Africa (hosted by the National Assembly of Zambia) and in Latin America (hosted by the Chamber of Deputies of Chile, in partnership with NDI). Discussion within both hubs continues via a dedicated WhatsApp group.
- Virtual meeting of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians (25 May)
- “Understanding women’s, children’s and adolescents’ health (regional webinar for parliamentary staff in sub-Saharan Africa on 17 June, organized with PMNCH, WHO, Living Goods Uganda and Countdown 2030)
- “Creating an enabling legislative environment for women’s, children’s and adolescents’ health” (regional webinar for parliamentary staff in sub-Saharan Africa on 24 June, organized with PMNCH, WHO, Living Goods Uganda and Countdown 2030)
- Quintet meeting, discussion with the Heads of the Geopolitical Groups and virtual launch of the IPU 130th Anniversary Book on International Day of Parliamentarism (30 June)
- [“Making the budget work for women, children and adolescents” – regional webinar for parliamentary staff in sub-Saharan Africa organized with PMNCH, WHO, Living Goods Uganda and Countdown 2030 \(2 July\)](#)
- [Webinar: Building back better: Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic to enhance the role of parliaments in disaster risk reduction \(9 July\)](#)
- [Virtual workshop \(with OHCHR and the Commonwealth Secretariat\) for parliamentarians from countries in the Caribbean and Canada \(all members of the Commonwealth\) entitled “Engaging parliaments on the promotion of human rights including on the work of the Human Rights Council and its Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\)” \(13 and 14 July\)](#)
- [Parliamentary Forum on the occasion of the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development \(15 July\)](#)
- [Virtual consultation co-organized with the International Development Law Organization on freedom of expression \(17 July\)](#)
- [Webinar for the Asia-Pacific region parliaments: “The impact of COVID-19 on SDG implementation in Asia-Pacific: What role for parliaments?”, organized with UN ESCAP \(28 July\)](#)
- [IPU Secretary General speaks at Parliamentary partnership of education, culture for sustainable development – AIPA \(30 July\)](#)
- [Online training with the women parliamentary caucus in Mauritania \(6 July and 10 August\)](#)
- [13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament \(17-18 August\)](#)
- [Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament \(19-20 August\)](#)

- Celebrating International Youth Day with interventions by the IPU Secretary General and the President of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians during the Samarkand Youth Forum (12 August)
- “Compliance and implementation under the Paris Agreement” (1/3 global webinars organized with UNFCCC, 27 August)
- IPU contribution to the informal consultation on the United Nations Treaty Body review (28 August)
- IPU Secretary General speaks at UNITE Global Summit (7 September)
- IPU Secretary General speaks at the 41st General Assembly of the AIPA (8 September)
- Satyarthi Children’s Foundation: Third Laureates and Leaders for Children Summit with participation of the IPU Secretary General (9-10 September)
- COVID-19 and democracy: Can parliaments come to the rescue? Virtual interactive panel debate organized for International Day of Democracy, in partnership with the Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory at Arizona State University (15 September)
- IPU Secretary General speaks at Inaugural meeting of the High Level Commission on ICPD25 Follow-up (17 September)
- “Law and governance approaches within the ocean-climate nexus” (2/3 global webinars organized with UNFCCC, 17 September)
- Parliaments and the UN: The way forward. An IPU event in the lead-up to the UN75 Summit. (17 September)
- Inaugural meeting of the High-Level Commission on ICPD25 Follow-up (17 September)
- Online UNGA side event: The Future of Multilateral Drug Policy (24 September)
- Parliamentary Responses to Solutions for Forced Displacement in the IGAD Region (30 September)
- The 46th session of the Steering Committee of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO (30 September)
- WE Empower Pitch Night with participation of the IPU Secretary General (30 September)
- The IPU Secretary General speaks at WHO side event: Sustainable preparedness for health security and resilience (1 October)
- Online intergenerational dialogue “Centering girls’ voices in the international arena”, organized on the occasion of the International Day of the Girl with the International Gender Champions, OHCHR, UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women, WHO, Plan International, the Permanent Missions of Mexico and the Netherlands in Geneva, among others (8 October)
- “Legislative approaches in ensuring social stability in communities facing climate-induced risks” (3/3 global webinars organized with UNFCCC, 8 October)
- Governance Reform and Partner Engagement Consultations – NGO and IGO (PMNCH) (9 October)
- The IPU Secretary General speaks at Virtual Session on achieving a green and inclusive recovery post COVID-19 – 2020 Virtual Global Parliamentary Forum at the World Bank & IMF Annual Meetings (14 October)
- Briefing for MPs on UN processes: SDG 1 and the UN definition of poverty (20 October)
- Virtual meeting of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians (22-30 October)
- IPU Secretary General speaks at Boston University Symposium “Democracy Beyond the Nation State” (28 October)

Future events

- Webinar “The impact of COVID-19 on SDG implementation in Africa: What role for parliaments?”, for African Parliaments, organized with UNECA (13 November)
- Webinar “Universal health coverage in times of COVID-19 – Parliamentary best practices and challenges” (17 November)
- Online event on young women’s political participation and leadership (18 November)
- Geneva Peace Week in November 2020 (“Towards evidence-informed disarmament and Parliaments’ Role in Linking Good Security Sector Governance to SDG16 amid COVID-19”)
- First meeting of the Parliamentary Caucus on FGM in Sierra Leone, organized with IPU’s support (First part of November)

- Reviewing UN Peacebuilding: A briefing for Parliamentarians, the second in a series of briefings organized by the Office of the Permanent Observer (18 November)
- In Indonesia the IPU will support the House of Representatives in organizing an SDG information webinar (19 November)
- Online panel discussion on violence against women in politics (co-organized with the Kofi Annan Foundation – 25 November)
- Online presentation of the IPU guidelines on the elimination of sexism and harassment in parliament to the Parlement de la communauté française de Belgique (25 November)
- Arab Regional Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda: The impact of COVID-19 on SDG implementation in Western Asia and the role of parliaments, organized with UN ESCWA (26 November)
- Inter-parliamentary virtual conversation on Parliaments and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (TBD – October-November)
- Project supporting enhanced data use in the Vanuatu Parliament in collaboration with the National Statistics Office of Vanuatu (October – November 2020)
- In Albania, the IPU will provide support in organizing an information webinar on the role of parliaments in SDG implementation, and a self-assessment exercise using the IPU/UNDP toolkit “Parliaments and the Sustainable Development Goals” (TBD – between November and December)
- Webinar entitled “The global post-COVID-19 economy: Devising sustainable trade policies to support the fights against poverty” (November 2020)
- Webinar entitled “The impact of COVID-19 on SDG implementation in Latin America: What role for parliaments?” for parliaments of Latin America, organized with UN ECLAC (TBD – between November and December)
- Webinar to strengthen the role of the Committee on human rights of the National Assembly of Senegal in the UPR process (November)
- Online event to re-launch the Not Too Young To Run campaign, in collaboration with partners (late 2020 or early 2021)
- Online conference on young women’s political participation in partnership with the UN Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth
- Sectoral budget analysis virtual training for staff of the National Assembly of Zambia (November - December)
- Online event to launch the 2020 report on youth participation in national parliaments and to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the IPU resolution *Youth participation in the democratic process*
- Virtual Expert Roundtable on the ‘why, what and who’ of monitoring and evaluation of parliamentary performance (December 2020)
- Online event to launch the handbook for parliamentarians on nutrition and food systems (late 2020 or early 2021)
- Webinar “Climate change adaptation in mountain areas: What role is there for parliaments?”, organized with the Adaptation at Altitude programme of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (11 December 2020).
- Webinar “SDGs financing in a time of pandemic” (TBD)

New publications, tools and content

- Redesign of Parline, the IPU's open data platform, with new data on Speakers, gender and youth
- Publication of an op-ed on gender and COVID-19 co-signed by the IPU Secretary General and the IGC Secretariat
- Publication of "Gender and COVID-19: A guidance note for parliaments"
- Publication of "Human Rights and COVID-19: A guidance note for parliaments"
- Translation of the IPU-UN Women map "Women in Politics" into Arabic and Turkish
- Translation of *Guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament* into Turkish, Korean, Japanese and Spanish
- Translation of the IPU's *Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments: A self-assessment toolkit* into Armenian and Ukrainian (in partnership with UNDP)
- Publication of *Road map for action on women's, children's and adolescents' health*, a handbook for parliamentarians
- Op-ed by the IPU Secretary General with the PMNCH Executive Director on World Health Day
- Op-ed by the IPU Secretary General on why power should be restored to parliaments
- Op-ed by the IPU Secretary General with UNDP Administrator, Achim Steiner
- Paper on parliamentary engagement on women's, children's and adolescents' health
- Publication of the IPU 130th Anniversary Book
- Publication of the IPU monthly e-bulletins and quarterly innovation trackers
- Publication of numerous news stories, videos, press releases and opinion pieces including on the pandemic, multilateralism, abused or tortured MPs, 130th anniversary celebrations, International Day of Parliamentarism, [International Day of Youth](#), [SDGs](#), [Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament](#), [gender equality](#), and [International Day of Democracy](#)
- Partnership with Arizona State University to create a series of four videos for parliamentarians on [SDG 5 – Gender Equality](#)
- Publication of Comparative research paper on parliamentary administration
- Publication of the IPU-UNDP Guidelines for enhancing the engagement and contribution of parliaments to effective development cooperation
- Translation of the IPU-UNDP toolkit "Parliaments and the Sustainable Development Goals: A self-assessment toolkit" into Ukrainian and Indonesian