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UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

HRC 41 - Side event Invitation

Parliamentary engagement on human rights: Identifying good practices and new opportunities for action

Tuesday, 25 June 2019, 9.30 – 12.30
Room XXIII, UN Palais des Nations

Background

Parliaments, in particular their human rights committees, have a critical role to play in the promotion and protection of human rights by turning international human rights obligations into meaningful action at the national level. Increasingly, United Nations human rights mechanisms, most notably the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) and the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), have recognized the potential of parliaments to help ensure better implementation of human rights standards, and have therefore started to include the work of parliaments more systematically in their own deliberations. In turn, parliaments—in particular parliamentary human rights committees—have intensified their efforts to acquire a better understanding of the functioning of UN human rights mechanisms and to contribute directly to their work.

The side-event is part of a three-day seminar for members of parliamentary human rights committees that aims to take stock of where these efforts have brought us to today and to identify good practices and new courses of action. The event will showcase and build on interesting examples of parliamentary engagement on human rights and parliamentary involvement in the work of UN human rights mechanisms. The seminar aims to identify additional ways to strengthen the contribution of parliament to the promotion and protection of human rights and to enhance synergies between parliaments and UN human rights mechanisms. The meeting will also examine inspiring examples of cooperation between parliaments, national human rights institutions and civil society, and the action parliaments can take to create an environment in which national human rights stakeholders can do their work freely and effectively. The seminar will address the steps that parliaments can take to implement a holistic agenda that incorporates both the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and human rights obligations. The seminar will also provide an opportunity to discuss and review the draft international principles in support of the work of parliamentary human rights committees as well as the building blocks of a human rights self-assessment toolkit for parliaments.

The seminar will draw, *inter alia*, on the IPU/OHCHR handbook on human rights for parliamentarians, the OHCHR report (HRC38/25) of May 2018 entitled “Contribution of parliaments to the work of the Human Rights Council and its universal periodic review”, the report of the second session of the UN Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law “Parliaments as promoters of human rights, democracy and the rule of law”, the recommendations and conclusions from previous IPU/OHCHR parliamentary capacity-building seminars, the IPU handbook on freedom of expression (2018) and the work of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. Some 69 parliamentarians from 34 countries have registered their attendance. ⇒

Programme

9.30 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. *High-level conversation between the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, the IPU Secretary General, Mr. Martin Chungong, parliamentarians and the human rights community present in Geneva*

10:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. **The protection of human rights at the national level: Strategies for enhanced parliamentary contribution**

Parliamentary prerogative in the areas of adopting legislation, overseeing government action, adopting the national budget, approving the ratification of international treaties and calling into question existing reservations, as well as public outreach and engagement with citizens, is critical in promoting human rights. Several parliaments have set up specific committees devoted to human rights in order to do this effectively.

This session will look at best practices in promoting parliamentary oversight, including those identified by the 2018 IPU/UNDP Global Parliamentary Report. It will offer a human-rights-based review of legislation and budget, of strong parliamentary human rights committees and of the proactive stance of parliaments on ratifications of international treaties and the withdrawal of reservations. The session will also look at parliamentary involvement in the development of national human rights action plans. Participants will be asked at the end of the session to provide in writing three concrete examples of their work in recent years that has helped to improve the enjoyment of human rights in their countries.

- Ms. Meg Munn, former member (2001 – 2015) of the House of Commons (UK), involved in drafting and using the IPU / UNDP Global Parliamentary Report on parliamentary oversight
- Ms. Janepher Nantume Egonyu, Chairperson of the Human Rights Committee, member of the National Assembly of Uganda
- Professor Akhmal Saidov, member of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan, Chairman of the Committee on Democratic institutions

Discussion ■