



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Executive Committee
Item 9

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Achieving IPU universal membership

(Strategic objective 5)

I. Introduction

The IPU is the global organization of national parliaments, promoting democratic governance, institutions and values. The IPU is working for peace, democracy, human rights, gender equality, youth empowerment and sustainable development through political dialogue, cooperation and parliamentary action. Currently with 179 national parliaments as Members, the IPU has identified universal membership as a strategic goal.

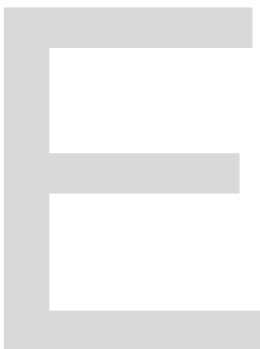
A core value of the Organization is inclusiveness and the full potential of this value can only be realized if the IPU is able to mobilize the entirety of the global parliamentary community and therefore be better able to articulate and address the full diversity of challenges facing this community, in a way that leaves no parliament feels left behind.

An organization that aspires to universal membership must be robust. Rules and practices should enable it to resonate with the evolving reality. Equally important is maintaining political relevance and designing actions that are born of common goals articulated by Members and that can lead to positive change. An organization such as the IPU, which brings together the representatives of the people, should be effective in helping their representatives deliver on the expectations of the people.

The IPU has been making progress in this regard through its Assemblies and the work of its statutory bodies, global summits mobilizing Speakers of parliaments, the growing partnership with the United Nations as well as with parliamentary organizations and networks, and tailored support to Member Parliaments. The path towards universal membership, however, has been paved with challenges, which may deepen as the world deals with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite substantial progress over the past years (increase in IPU membership from 155 to 179 since 2010), some parliaments remain unaffiliated with the IPU. These include the US Congress, Liberia, as well as about a dozen small island developing States (SIDS).

Member Parliaments that owe arrears in their membership contribution with the IPU fall under the purview of statutory provisions which either limit or suspend their membership rights. These statutory provisions safeguard the Organization from undesired precedents, such as Members maintaining their status and voting rights without meeting their financial obligations, which should be evidence of their commitment to the Organization. The IPU Rules also provide measures aimed at encouraging parliaments to take corrective steps with regard to their arrears, such as the establishment of minimal payments to help preserve membership rights until such time as the arrears may be paid fully or the maintenance of rights in situations where the inability to pay is due to causes beyond the control of parliaments (as has been the case of Venezuela in recent years).



Such measures, however, may have limited success if the number of Member Parliaments in arrears increases over time. The IPU may find itself in a situation where applying sanctions on a growing number of parliaments impacts its mandate, its capacity to deliver on its work programme and, most importantly, its global convening power.

The international environment and national determinants may help explain, in varying degrees, why some parliaments have not acceded to the IPU and the reasons behind the current arrears of several Members. Although precise reasons are difficult to ascertain, these might be related to domestic political and/or social turmoil, institutional weaknesses, difficult economic conditions forcing countries to make choices as to the organizations in which they wish to continue to honour their financial obligations, the high cost of sending delegations to meetings at remote locations, limited awareness of or interest in the IPU.

Over the years, the IPU has developed strategies and created mechanisms to help expand the IPU membership and better engage parliaments that are either geographically remote or limited in resources. These include:

- The establishment in 2016 of a Parliamentary Solidarity Fund designed to provide financial support for the participation of non-Member SIDS parliaments in IPU Assemblies. A few small island developing States parliaments have benefitted from the Fund, which currently stands at CHF 92,700 and will need to be replenished periodically in order to provide continued support.
- The organization of IPU workshops and other activities in remote areas, especially for the Pacific Island parliaments and those of the Caribbean – with the support of active Members from the respective regions (Australia, New Zealand, Trinidad & Tobago, Suriname, etc.).
- Engaging non-Member Parliaments in regional IPU events and other activities such as the annual Information Seminar on the structure and functioning of the IPU.
- Providing support as appropriate to the Geopolitical Groups to ensure the full participation of all Members, large and small (the IPU currently covers the costs of English-language interpretation for GRULAC meetings at the IPU Assemblies – in support of the Caribbean parliaments, as well as logistical assistance for meetings of the SIDS parliaments)
- Targeted visits to parliaments of interest, such as the visit by the Chair of GRULAC and the IPU Permanent Observer in New York to Honduras in 2018, or the visit by the IPU Secretary General to Barbados in early 2020.
- The organization of thematic roundtable discussions in the US Congress to raise awareness about the IPU and the benefits of membership.

The Executive Committee is invited to examine the situation of Members in arrears whose membership rights have been limited or suspended, as well as non-Member Parliaments, and identify possible courses of action for the IPU Secretariat, with the support of the Executive Committee, Geopolitical Groups and the wider membership.

II. Current status of membership

Members whose rights are currently suspended (IPU Statutes and Rules: Article 5.3)¹

Non-participating Members: Honduras and Papua New Guinea

Possible challenges:

- Humanitarian crisis and economic situation straining the ability of countries to meet the rights and responsibilities of membership.
- Low interest in the IPU, compounded by institutional lethargy to cooperate.
- Complex political circumstances and political fragmentation hindering parliaments from developing links with the IPU.

¹ IPU Statutes and Rules, Article 5.3: "When a Member or Associate Member of the IPU is three years in arrears in the payment of its contributions to the IPU, the Executive Committee shall consider the situation, on a case-by-case basis, and in close consultation with the Member or Associate Member concerned, and express an opinion to the Governing Council. The Governing Council shall take a decision on the suspension of the rights of that Member or Associate Member."

Possible courses of action:

- Continue to systematically keep the parliaments abreast of their status in the IPU.
- Bring the IPU to the national level through targeted dissemination of information on IPU activities via electronic means.
- Engage the Chairs of the Geopolitical Groups and other IPU champions from the region in virtual bilateral meetings with the leadership of the respective parliaments.
- Invite MPs and staff to attend select IPU activities, in particular regional seminars on issues of interest (sustainable development, climate change, good governance, human rights, youth empowerment, gender equality, etc.).

Members liable for suspension of rights (IPU Statutes and Rules: Article 5.3)²

Parliaments currently in this situation, having accumulated over three years of arrears in the payment of their assessed contributions: Comoros, Dominican Republic, Venezuela.

Possible challenges:

- Adverse political trends at the national level constraining the proper functioning of parliaments.
- Precarious economic climate, poverty, geographical remoteness and vulnerability to climate change, forcing national authorities to prioritize scarce financial resources.
- Financial constraints and lack of resources preventing parliaments from participating in IPU activities.

Possible courses of action:

- Continue to systematically inform the parliaments of the status of their IPU membership.
- Virtual consultations between the IPU President and the leadership of parliaments, backstopped by bilateral meetings between the IPU SG and the Permanent Representatives based in Geneva, as well as interventions by the Chairs of the Geopolitical Groups and other IPU champions in the region.
- Showcase the value of the IPU through virtual regional events with prominent roles for the members in question.
- Work with the hosts of future IPU Assemblies to explore possible funding for participation (as was the case with recent Assemblies held in St. Petersburg, Doha and Belgrade).

Members liable for restriction of rights (IPU Statutes and Rules: Article 5.2)³

Ten Members currently in arrears of over two years: Central African Republic, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Libya, Mali, Saint Lucia, South Sudan, Sudan, Vanuatu.

² IPU Statutes and Rules, Article 5.3: "When a Member or Associate Member of the IPU is three years in arrears in the payment of its contributions to the IPU, the Executive Committee shall consider the situation, on a case-by-case basis, and in close consultation with the Member or Associate Member concerned, and express an opinion to the Governing Council. The Governing Council shall take a decision on the suspension of the rights of that Member or Associate Member."

³ IPU Statutes and Rules, Article 5.2: "Any Member of the IPU which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no votes in the statutory bodies of the Inter-Parliamentary Union if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years. The Governing Council may, nevertheless, permit such a Member to vote if it is satisfied that the failure to pay is due to conditions beyond the control of the Member of the IPU. Prior to examining this question, the Governing Council may receive a written explanation from the Member concerned. Notwithstanding the provisions of Article 10.2 of the Statutes, such a Member shall not be represented by more than two delegates at meetings convened by the IPU. An Associate Member which is in arrears of the payment of its financial contributions in an amount that equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years, shall not be represented by more than one delegate at meetings convened by the IPU."

Possible challenges:

- Political and/or social turmoil hindering the development and functioning of national political institutions. In the case of both Mali and Sudan, an interim legislative body has been established following the dissolution of the parliament.
- Economic downturn, countries lacking capacity to sustain themselves financially in the context of global uncertainty, lack of adequate infrastructure to cope with existing and emerging social needs.
- Barriers at the national level preventing parliaments from settling their arrears with the IPU.
- Geographical remoteness, coupled with financial constraints and lack of resources, discouraging parliaments from engaging with the Organization.

Possible courses of action:

- Virtual consultations between the IPU President and the leadership of parliaments, backstopped by bilateral meetings between the IPU SG and the Permanent Representatives based in Geneva, as well as interventions by the Chairs of the Geopolitical Groups and other IPU champions in the region.
- Encourage the participation of parliaments in the statutory meetings of the IPU.
- Consider, on a case-by-case basis, online national workshops/capacity development activities for staff/MPs, in particular from countries with severe national circumstances and/or affected by their geographical location.

Non-Member Parliaments

There are currently 14 non-Member Parliaments which broadly fall into two main categories:

1. Small island developing States (SIDS), with very limited resources and whose international cooperation is generally focused on the Commonwealth Parliamentary Assembly (which provides some financial support to facilitate their participation): Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Kiribati, Nauru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Solomon Islands.

The IPU will continue its action to foster regular dialogue, convene regional workshops on issues of particular interest, engage Speakers in high-level events (including future Assemblies and the in-person Speakers' Conference in Vienna in 2021), tap into the available resources of the Parliamentary Solidarity Fund, and explore avenues for possible technical assistance. The Executive Committee may wish to examine other measures to complement this work.

2. US Congress and Liberia

The US Congress was a founding member of the IPU and engaged actively in the Organization over many years. This engagement was particularly active during the Cold War. The US Congress formally ceased its participation in the work of the IPU in 2000 and the IPU suspended its membership in 2003. A background note on US-IPU relations and the IPU strategy to re-engage the US Congress is available in the **Annex**. The incoming US Administration has indicated its intention to be more actively engaged in multilateralism. The Congress is currently controlled by Democrats who are more inclined to engage multilaterally. These factors offer a new window of opportunity to bring the US Congress closer to the IPU. This can only be achieved with the strong involvement of the IPU leadership and broader membership.

Liberia is also a founding member of the IPU, yet due to political instability and other domestic priorities, it has been in and out of the IPU several times over the decades (affiliation periods: 1889-1890, 1955-1980, 1986-1990, 1991-1995, 1999-2003, 2004-2011). Since its last suspension in 2011, the IPU has tried continuously to re-engage the Parliament in various ways, including reaching out to then President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The Speaker of the House of Representatives has attended a few IPU high-level events and held discussions with IPU officials in recent years – including on the occasion of the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in 2015 and the Doha Assembly in 2019 – yet despite assurances of reaffiliation this has not occurred. The continued involvement of IPU leaders – including of Speakers of Parliament from the African Group – would be helpful in bringing the Parliament of Liberia back as a fully-fledged member of the IPU.

III. General recommendations

The Executive Committee may wish to consider the following recommendations for action to advance universal membership of the IPU:

- Include and maintain universal membership on the agenda of the IPU President/Secretary General and other IPU officials, with the Secretariat providing relevant support.
- Virtual consultations between the IPU President and Secretary General and the leadership of parliaments in arrears.
- Establishment of a programme of visits to some of the main unaffiliated parliaments, ideally with support from other influential Members.
- A regular dialogue between the IPU President, Secretary General and the Chairpersons of the Geopolitical Groups, with a view to obtaining their support in reaching out to members in arrears and to unaffiliated parliaments.
- Explore the benefit of convening a special meeting (*limited format*) dedicated to the issue of members in arrears on the margins of one of the forthcoming IPU statutory meetings.
- Explore the opportunity of designing special events (including in virtual format) for Members in arrears and for unaffiliated parliaments.
- Enhance the contribution of the IPU to the identification and resolution of the open issues in a post-pandemic global environment (the post-COVID recovery and building back better, good governance, human rights, human capital development, etc.).
- Raise the visibility of the Parliamentary Solidarity Fund, seek renewed contributions towards the Fund and encourage those parliaments who attended in Doha and Belgrade to return to an IPU Assembly.
- Pursue programme of capacity building for small island developing States with the support of regional neighbours.

Members of the Executive Committee may wish to make other suggestions intended to achieve IPU universal membership.

Relations between the IPU and the United States Congress

The US Congress was one of the founding members of the IPU. For many decades, and particularly during the Cold War, it played an active role in the Organization. However, during the 1990s the participation of the US Congress in the IPU weakened. The last full bipartisan participation of a US delegation in an IPU Assembly was in 1994 (91st Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Paris). Despite various efforts to prevent the Congress from leaving the IPU, a formal "severance" notice was received from the US Secretary of State (further to a decision of the US Congress) in September 2000. The IPU formally suspended the US Congress in 2003, for non-payment of their assessed contribution.

Why the US Congress left the IPU

Several factors contributed to the Congress' decision to leave the IPU, including dynamics that are particular to the Congress and to US politics as well as factors that relate to the IPU as an organization:

- The short two-year term of 435 members of the House of Representatives, (in contrast to the Senate, with 100 members elected for six years at a time), requires an election every other year in November which limits representatives' travel and international engagement (this trend came to the fore after the elections of 1994, when the Republican Party reclaimed the leadership of the US Congress).
- The US claimed that the cost of membership in the IPU was high (at the time the US was the IPU's top contributor with over US\$ 1 million in annual fees, accounting for 15% of the IPU's annual budget). In the absence of travel by US members of Congress to IPU events, the Clerks of the two Houses had suggested to the IPU that the US assessed contribution be replaced by a voluntary annual contribution of US\$ 500,000 (half the regular amount – this suggestion was not accepted by the IPU governing bodies).
- A growing sentiment against institutions of global governance, such as the United Nations, which are seen as encroaching in US jurisdiction.
- The perception of some that the IPU had become a "talk shop" (and not "a decision-making body") and therefore of little relevance within the evolving architecture of international organizations.
- The fact that the US had no veto power within the IPU, and that the IPU was seen as inimical to key US allies (references were made to "US- and Israel-bashing" at IPU meetings).
- A rejection of certain allegedly autocratic regimes, which in the eyes of the US had no place inside an organization devoted to the promotion of democracy.

Constraining factors

Unlike most other parliaments, where Speakers and party leaders have a great deal of power when it comes to decisions regarding institutional relations, the leadership of Congress tends to defer to the recommendations of select committees and the other members. The selection of delegations to Assemblies is often more informal than in other parliaments. While belonging to political parties, representatives and senators are more independent than in most other parliaments. As a result, the decision to rejoin the IPU requires the support of a critical mass of members of Congress and not just of the leadership.

This was one of the main messages conveyed by Speaker Nancy Pelosi in 2007, during meetings with Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, then Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies and IPU President.

The decision to re-join the IPU needs to be bipartisan. The two-party system of the US Congress which, at any given time, sees one party in control of either House, would make a unilateral decision to join the IPU by just one party inherently controversial and subject to political opposition.

Progress made in 2008- 2010 – which included a US Congressional delegation attending the 120th IPU Assembly in Addis-Ababa in 2009, the IPU-UN eParliament Conference hosted by Speaker Pelosi on Capitol Hill, and the bipartisan adoption of the draft Foreign Operations Bill (with authorization for the US to re-join the IPU) by the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee (the Bill passed the Committee but was never submitted for adoption in the plenary of the Senate) – was curbed considerably after the 2010 elections when the Congressional leadership returned to the Republican Party, accompanied by a much more divisive political environment.

The IPU approach to US Congress re-affiliation

Recognizing the importance of the US as a key global player, the IPU has worked steadily over the past fifteen years to re-engage the US Congress as a full member. Many influential Members have over the years stressed the importance of the US re-joining the IPU fold.

In pursuing this objective, the IPU has sought to:

- Show the value of the IPU to the US and its foreign policy interests, particularly with respect to questions of democracy, gender equality, human rights, and peace and security.
- Demonstrate the relevance of the IPU as a global player, particularly as a result of internal reforms, as well as of the growing partnership with the United Nations and related organizations.

The **practical ways** in which the IPU has sought to re-engage the US Congress include:

- Organizing events at the US Congress on bipartisan issues of clear political relevance and with the co-sponsorship of a caucus or a committee (e.g., the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, Women Caucus, the Black Caucus).
- Encouraging participation of US Congress representatives in IPU Assemblies or specialized meetings, including the annual Parliamentary Hearing at the UN (several editions), the World Conference of Speakers of Parliament (2005 and 2015) and the Conference of Young Parliamentarians (Ottawa, 2017).
- Distributing IPU publications (such as the map of Women's political participation to the Women's caucus and in meetings with Congress representatives and staff).
- Encouraging the IPU Members, in particular Speakers of parliament to include the IPU on their agenda of bilateral discussions with Congressional leaders.
- Raising the profile of the IPU with Washington-based think tanks, foundations and foreign missions by participating in events, panel discussions and policy initiatives.
- Lobbying key Congress representatives and senators, and their staff, through one-on-one meetings with the IPU leadership. Members of the House and Senate foreign relations committees and the House Appropriations Committee continue to be priority contacts for IPU officials.
- Engaging with the State Department on specific issues on the international agenda and seeking the Secretary of State's personal support of the IPU as a global player. The IPU SG has in the past engaged with then Secretary of State John Kerry, a strong supporter of the IPU.
- Working with the UN-US Association and UN Foundation, engaging with members of Congress and their staff when they attend meetings at the UN in New York.

2021-2022 outlook and suggested steps

The Democratic Party has returned to power with former Senator Joe Biden as President, and a majority of seats in the House of Representatives as well as control of the Senate. US leadership has signaled a keen interest to strengthen multilateralism and re-engage with international organizations, including the United Nations.

There is now a window of opportunity until the mid-term Congressional election in November 2022 to make the case for re-affiliation into the IPU **by showing the relevance of the Organization to the US.**

President-elect Biden has pledged to support democracy building globally, beginning with convening a major conference in 2021. Many members of the US Congress will be looking for opportunities to rebuild trust and mend broken relationships.

An active campaign where the IPU Member Parliaments raise awareness of the IPU by connecting directly with their US colleagues, as well as through their US-affiliated friendship groups, should begin as soon as possible.

To get the IPU before members of the US Congress the IPU needs to focus on key objectives including:

- Securing high profile engagement of the IPU leadership (President – who has pledged his full attention to the issue, as well as the Secretary General and members of the Executive Committee) in the US-sponsored Democracy Summit.
- Identifying opportunities for the IPU officials to participate in congressional meetings, particularly sessions of the Foreign Affairs Committees where the IPU may contribute a perspective on either global or bilateral issues.
- Providing a channel of communication between the US Congress and the parliamentary leadership of countries with which relations need to be rebuilt.
- Engaging US Congress members in IPU meetings on climate change, trade and gender as key issues of interest to the new Administration.

The IPU Members would work in coordination with the IPU Secretariat and engage also with their respective ambassadors to the US. Congressional proceedings will need to be followed closely to identify opportunities for substantive engagement as well as for interaction with the IPU leadership. Dedicated IPU resources will help track progress and follow up on interactions with Congress members.