



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION (IPU) BRIEFER





INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION (IPU)

About the IPU

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is an international organisation that supports and enhances the parliamentary institution while assisting parliamentarians in effectively, freely and safely representing the interests of their constituents. It promotes democratic governance by empowering national parliaments. The IPU gives parliamentarians a voice at the international level and facilitates multilateral cooperation. To serve as a focal point for worldwide parliamentary dialogue, it performs these roles:

- 1 Fosters communication, coordination and knowledge sharing between parliaments and lawmakers worldwide;
- 2 Considers problems of global concern and interest and offers its opinions on them to influence parliamentary and legislative action;
- 3 Contributes to the protection and advancement of human rights, which are crucial for parliamentary democracy and growth; and
- 4 Contributes to improve understanding of how representative institutions operate and develops and strengthens these institutions' capabilities.

Brief History

The IPU was created in 1889. In the 19th century, two Members of Parliament (MPs), Frenchman Frédéric Passy and Englishman William Randal Cremer, were instrumental in leading the movement in favour of arbitration treaties between France and the United States and Great Britain and the United States before World War I. This laid the groundwork for both parliamentarians to build an international organisation together, with a mission to resolve global conflict through peaceful arbitration during the interwar period. They arranged the first ever worldwide conference of parliamentarians in 1889 and the conference is now known as the IPU Assembly. Passy was elected President and Cremer Vice-President. Only nine British MPs ultimately crossed the English Channel to attend the meeting with 25 of their French counterparts. But as the international participation increased, the MPs decided to meet every year.

The IPU played a key role in establishing the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague in 1899. Its recommendations for the establishment of an organisation that would serve as a bridge between nations helped create the groundwork for the League of Nations in 1919 and the United Nations (UN) in 1945. It has developed into a strong, influential organisation working to advance democracy, equality, human rights, development and peace.

The organisation adopted its current name—the Inter-Parliamentary Union—in 1899.

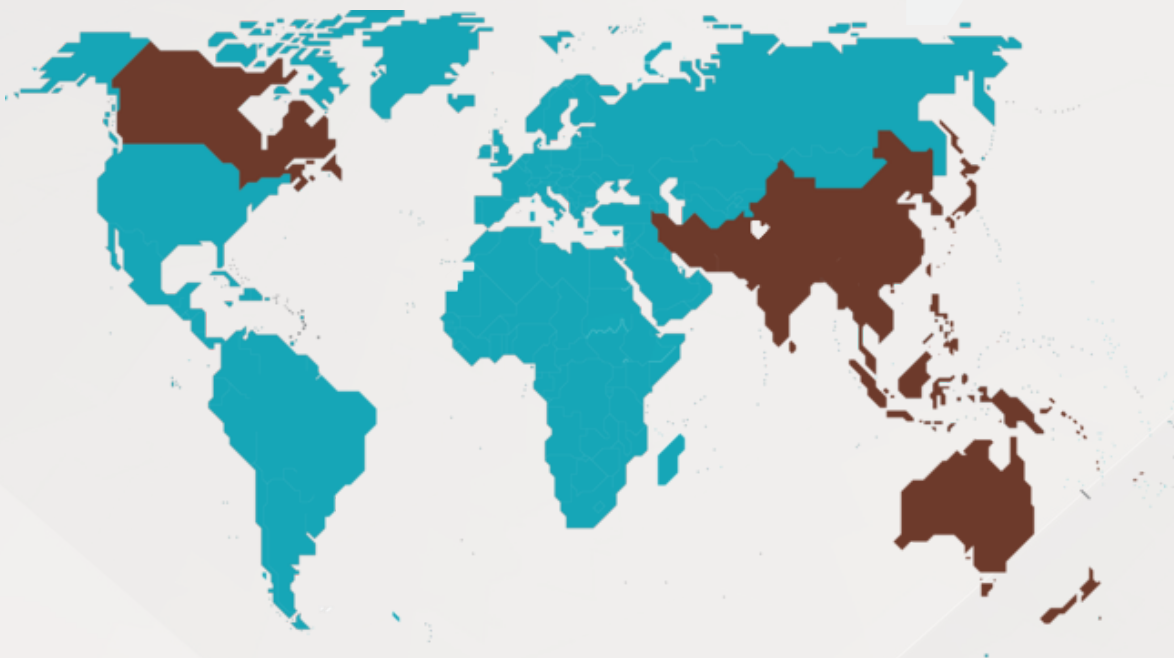
Membership, Structure and Governance

The IPU membership is made up of 178 national parliaments and 14 associate members. Members represent more than 6.5 billion of the world's 8 billion people. The headquarters of the IPU is in Geneva, Switzerland.

Geopolitical Groups

The IPU first created geopolitical groups at the start of the 1950s. Their original goal was to guarantee an equitable geographical allocation of seats on the IPU's Executive Committee and other bodies. They also review and suggest candidates and coordinate agenda at assemblies and on emergency issues. At present there are six geopolitical groups namely, African Groups, Arab Groups, Eurasia Group, GURLAC (Group of Latin America and the Caribbean), Asia-Pacific Group and the Twelve Plus Group which is made up of mostly European nations, alongside other Western states including Canada, New Zealand and Australia. There are 36 members in the IPU from the Asia-Pacific region which form the Asia-Pacific geopolitical group.

Figure 1: Asia-Pacific Geopolitical Group*

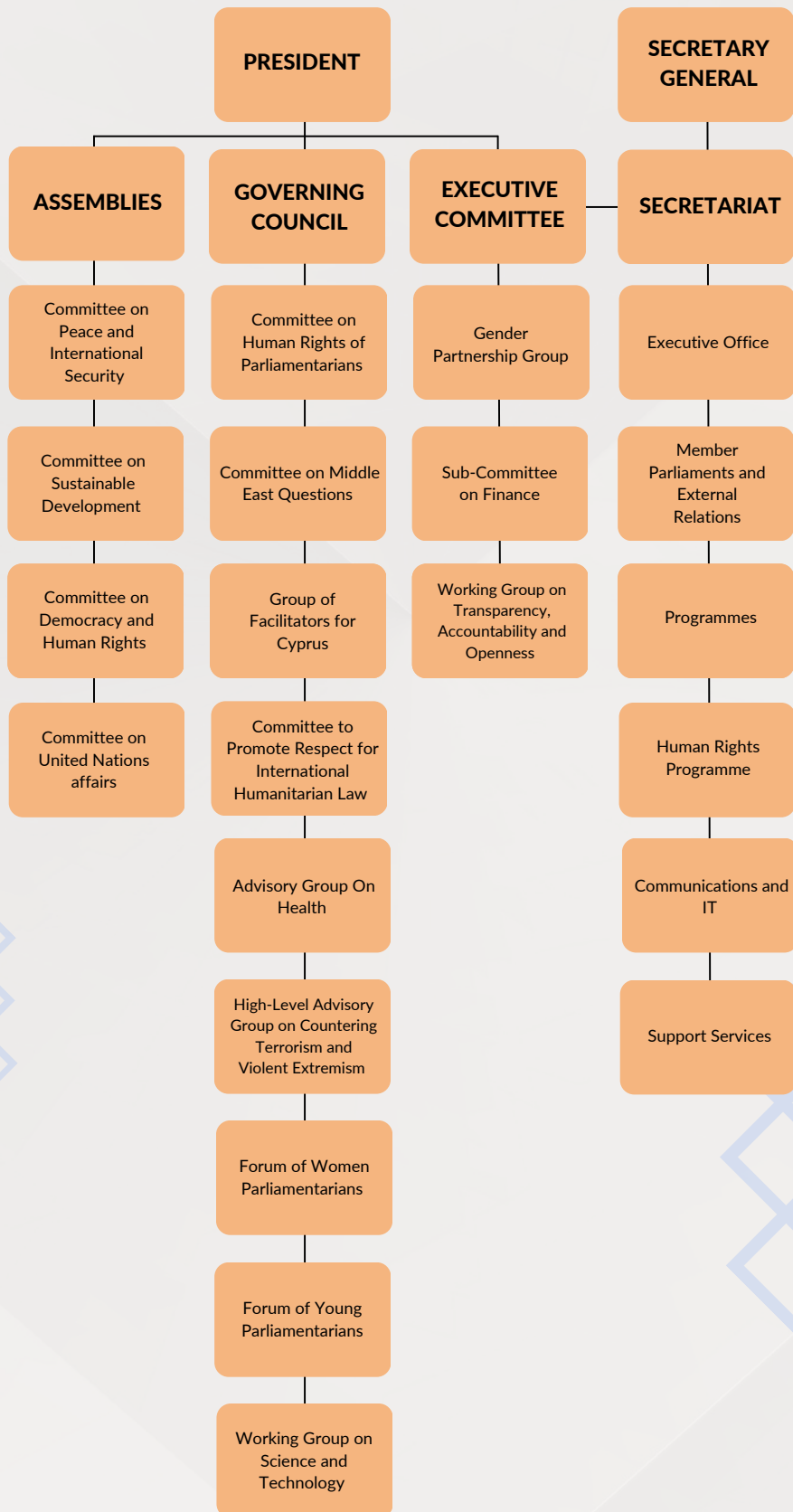


Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

*The Asia-Pacific and Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group of the IPU both include Canada. In 1997, Canada requested formal membership of the Asia-Pacific Group because of its active trade connections with the Asia-Pacific region.

Structure and Governance of the IPU

Figure 2: Structure and Governance of the IPU.



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

Primary Organs of the IPU

The Assembly

The Assembly is the main political body through which the IPU has emerged as the only global organisation for parliamentary networking. It is composed of parliamentarians designated as delegates by the Members of the IPU. The number of delegates appointed by a member of the IPU to the Assembly shall not exceed eight or less delegates for countries with inhabitants less than 100 million, and ten or less delegates for countries with inhabitants more than 100 million. It strives for equal representation of men and women parliamentarians in their delegation.

The Assembly meets twice a year. The IPU's Member Parliaments adopt parliamentary resolutions on global issues through the Assembly facilitated by the IPU's four thematic standing committees:

1. Peace and International Security
2. Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade
3. Democracy and Human Rights
4. United Nations Affairs

MPs from all around the world can connect at the Assemblies to share best practices and forge parliamentary connections.

Governing Council

The administrative and policy-making body of the IPU is the Governing Council. Its meetings are held during twice-yearly Assemblies. Its role includes:

- i) Making decisions about the member admission, readmission and suspension in the IPU;
- ii) Reviewing the work plan and budget;
- iii) Determining the mandates and composition of committees, working groups and ad hoc bodies, as well as electing the President and Secretary General.

International organisations' representatives are amongst others who may be asked to participate in the Council's proceedings as observers. The Governing Council is made up of three MPs from each Member Parliament, provided that the delegation includes both men and women.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee oversees the administration of the IPU and makes recommendations to the Governing Council on various matters, including applications by national parliaments or regional parliamentary assemblies wishing to join the IPU. It also assesses candidates for the post of Secretary General. It meets at least twice a year before the Assemblies. It is made up of the President of the IPU, 15 elected members from the IPU's different geopolitical groups, the President of the Bureau of Women Parliamentarians and the President of the Board of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians.

The Secretariat

At the centre of the IPU's structure, the Secretariat manages daily operations. Most of the Secretariat is based at the Geneva Headquarters, in the House of Parliaments. The Secretariat, under the direction of the Secretary General, assists the MPs in strengthening their institutions and achieving their policy priorities. The Secretariat develops its work plan and budget with the goal of assisting the IPU in achieving their strategic goals.

Chief Functionaries of the IPU

The President of the IPU is the political head of the organisation. The President opens, suspends and closes the sittings, directs the work of the Assembly, ensures that the rules are observed and directs the overall work of the IPU. He/She/They chair/s all the sessions and represent/s the IPU internationally.



The Secretary General is the Chief Executive of the organisation. The Secretary General plays an important role in defining and implementing the political decisions taken by the IPU and facilitates resource mobilisation.



Procedure of Election of President, General Secretary and Executive Members: Voting shall be conducted by secret ballot for the election of the President, the appointment of the Secretary General and the election of members of the Executive Committee.



Mandates, Rules and Regulations of the IPU

Rules

IPU Membership – Who can be members?

- Parliaments constituted in conformity with the laws of a sovereign state
- Parliaments whose aspirations and entitlement to statehood are recognised by the UN
- Federal Parliaments

Functioning of the IPU

Principles and Statutes

- Every member of the IPU shall adhere to the principles of the IPU and comply with its statutes.

Associate Members

- International parliamentary assemblies established under international law by States which are represented in the IPU may, upon their request and after consultation with the relevant Members of the IPU, be admitted by the Governing Council as Associate Members.

Geopolitical Groups

- The members of the IPU may form geopolitical groups.
- Each group shall decide on the working methods that best suit its participation in the activities of the organisation.

- It shall inform the IPU Secretariat of its composition, the names of its officers, and its rules of procedure.

IPU Secretariat

- Comprises the totality of the staff of the organisation under the direction of the Secretary General of the IPU

Association of Secretary Generals of Parliaments

- Consultative body of the IPU
- Administered autonomously.

Forums and Committees

The IPU is composed of different forums and committees working on strengthening the parliamentarians. (Refer to the organogram on page 3 for the different types of committees).

Highlights of a few important committees are below:

The Forum of Women Parliamentarians

This is a global platform for women MPs to influence democratic decision making at national and international levels. The Forum strives to address inadequate political representation of women in national parliaments, within IPU bodies and at the IPU's Assemblies. It provides a gender sensitive perspective on the overall work of the IPU.

The Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians

The Committee is responsible for protecting and defending MPs across the world from abuse, arbitrary detention, violation of rights, torture and mistreatment. It holds hearings, undertakes missions, rigorous fact checking, impartial and independent actions and sends trial observers.

The Forum of Young Parliamentarians

The Forum is a platform for young MPs to engage in global decision-making and provide their insights to ensure the voice of youth is reflected in the overall work of the IPU and in the formal democratic process.

Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Laws

The Committee plays a pivotal role in promoting and advocating respect for international humanitarian laws through the adoption and ratification of relevant laws and treaties, organising field missions, especially in conflict areas. The Committee also works towards the protection of refugees, internally displaced people and on the issue of statelessness.

Impact Areas at the IPU

The IPU works to make parliaments more effective, representative and innovative so that they can take action to improve people's lives in the following policy areas:

- Climate change;
- Democracy, human rights, gender equality and youth participation;
- Peace and security; and
- Sustainable development for all.

The IPU's Strategic Plan

The work of the IPU is guided by its five-year strategic plan. It lays down guiding principles to achieve the organisation's overall objective. The IPU works on its strategic planning in consultation with its members and stakeholders. The process of planning includes an assessment of the achievement and performance of the IPU after the completion of every five-year plan. Based on the assessment of the current strategic plan, a roadmap is prepared for where the organisation should be in five years' time.

The key priority themes identified by the IPU are as follows:

1. **Climate Change:**The IPU will help parliaments to advance the Paris Agreement and other climate-relevant treaties and take steps to reduce its own carbon footprints.
2. **Democracy, Human Rights, Gender Equality and Youth Participation:**The IPU will protect the human rights of people and parliamentarians with particular focus on under-represented groups like women, youth and marginalised sections. It strives to safeguard freedom of expression while addressing the misuse of social media like hate speech, etc.
3. **Peace and Security:** In order to work towards this goal, the IPU will prioritise assistance to parliaments in upholding the UN Charter and implementing UN instruments and measures to prevent violent extremism and counter terrorism. It will involve women and youth in decision making on conflict resolutions and peace-building.
4. **Sustainable Development:** The IPU will prioritise its action on overall attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with emphasis on the socio-economic reasons contributing to the marginalisation of vulnerable groups. It will contribute towards accessibility of basic services to all sections of society particularly health services.

Objectives of the Strategic Plan:

1. Building effective and empowered parliaments
2. Promoting inclusive and representative parliaments
3. Supporting resilient and innovative parliaments
4. Catalysing collective parliamentary actions
5. Strengthening the IPU's accountability

These goals will be combined to have a significant impact on the policy areas that members have stated need to be prioritised and addressed urgently during the next five years.

Knowledge Resources

The publications of the IPU are primarily intended for legislators and decision-makers. Numerous translations of the books are offered. The IPU has different sets of resources and a knowledge bank that can be categorised as follows:

Publications

It has around 207 publications designed for parliamentarians and policy-makers, which includes handbooks, reports, toolkits, newsletters, case studies, manuals and infographics. Some important publications such as 'The Global Parliamentary Report', which is a joint endeavour of the IPU and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), aims to enhance the work of parliamentary institutions by providing good practices and setting international standards for strong democratic parliaments. 'Women in Parliament' is an annual report which provides an overview on the situation of women parliamentarians worldwide.

Parline Data

The IPU Parline is a global database on national parliaments collected directly through correspondents from parliaments across the world. Parline also provides comparative data which helps to draw correlations and comparisons between functions and working methods of national parliaments. The information includes a wide range of topics, such as the number of chambers, the proportion of female MPs, the number of laws that the parliament has proposed and the average age of lawmakers. The database can be accessed [here](#).

The IPU Innovation Tracker:

The Innovation Tracker is a blog about recent innovations in the way parliaments do their work. It is where MPs and staff find ideas for solving some of the problems they face in running an effective parliament. The tracker can be accessed [here](#).

iKNOW Politics

The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics) is a platform that partners with the IPU and other experts and offers exchange of knowledge and dialogue for those involved in participation of women in politics worldwide. The platform can be accessed [here](#).

Forum of Women Parliamentarians: Origin, History and Purpose

Since 1995, two women have been elected as President of the IPU: the first female President was Najma Heptulla (India) in 1999, followed by Gabriela Cuevas (Mexico) in 2017. Gabriela is also the youngest President in the IPU's history

Since the 1980s, women MPs have had a dedicated structure - The Forum of Women Parliamentarians - to give female representatives a stronger voice in the organisation and quotas have been introduced to enhance women's role in decision-making. The idea of the Forum was conceived from the work of the Women's Caucus within the IPU which has been working since 1978.

The Forum meets during each IPU Assembly and is a pioneer in the field of women's political participation. The Bureau of Women Parliamentarians is constituted through election by the Forum of Women Parliamentarians on the recommendation of women parliamentarians from respective geopolitical groups. It supports and organises the work of the Forum. It also facilitates and coordinates between the Forum and other bodies of IPU. The Bureau oversees the Gender Partnership Group's activities, plans the Forum's activities, and submits reports to the Governing Council.

The IPU is the first organisation of its kind to codify the commitment to women's representation and responsibilities. Other groups and organisations use their experience for guidance on how to introduce similar policies. In October 2013, the IPU also formally adopted a policy on gender mainstreaming.

Achievements

Both the Forum and the Bureau of Women Parliamentarians have played crucial roles in bringing gender equality in parliaments and are the driving force behind the IPU's work on gender-equal parliaments which can be listed as follows:

- The continuous work of the Forum has resulted in the formation of the rule within the IPU that requires any parliament with women members to include at least one woman in their delegations to statutory meetings. Some voting rights are affected if no women are included in delegations.
- Sanctions can be imposed on MPs who consistently fail to apply gender equality rules.
- In 1978, only 7.7 per cent of the IPU Assembly delegates were women. Now, women MPs regularly account for about 30 per cent of participants.
- The Forum represents the voices of Women Caucuses or parliamentary groups that are bodies within national parliaments advocating and influencing mainstream legislation to address gender discrimination and equal political participation of women. The caucuses across the world, through their political activism, have influenced activities on a range of issues, but most particularly on Violence Against Women (VAW), healthcare and child rights.
- In October 2013, the IPU also formally adopted a policy on gender mainstreaming.
- The IPU published a landmark report on sexism and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in parliaments.

Strategy to Mainstream Gender



The IPU follows a broad policy of gender-mainstreaming to achieve its objectives. It does this in the following ways:

Framework:

- Institutionalise gender equality at the IPU.
- Monitor and review the Statutes and Rules, as well as other institutional documents.
- Create a gender-sensitive work environment.
- Monitor and review human resource practices and policies to align them with the gender needs and interests of both men and women.

Actors:

- Monitor, review and adopt measures in the representation, participation of IPU Members and Secretariat staff from a gender perspective
- Improve the knowledge and competencies of Members and Secretariat staff, including management, on gender equality, gender-sensitive parliaments and gender mainstreaming.

Methods and procedures:

- Develop mechanisms and tools for gender mainstreaming.
- Develop processes to mainstream gender equality, including on-going consultations with women and men to include their perspectives in the implementation of IPU programmes and projects.
- Set annual gender equality targets, indicators and objectives in all sectors of the IPU's work.
- Develop effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

The building blocks for mainstreaming gender include:

- **Gender Analysis:** The IPU will carry out gender assessments prior to the development and implementation of projects and activities.
- **Gender-specific Action:** The IPU will take action to redress gender-based inequalities and discrimination identified through gender analysis.
- **Gender Planning:** The IPU will develop a plan for incorporating the knowledge gained through gender analysis into all aspects of its work.
- **Gender-sensitive Monitoring and Evaluation:** The IPU will develop a process for reviewing the extent to which its overall work is meeting gender equality targets.
- **Capacity-building:** The IPU will promote the understanding of gender mainstreaming and gender concepts among staff and management.
- **Knowledge-sharing:** The IPU will collect and organise data and subsequently share this knowledge with a wider audience and its partners.

Resources/Publications on Gender Equality

The IPU has published papers on sexism and gender-based violence in the legislature that have examined both female lawmakers and female parliamentary personnel. The IPU has databases on gender equality, gender electoral quotas and women's parliamentary caucuses. Some of them are as follows:

Gender Sensitive Parliament, A Global Review of Good Practice, 2011 highlighted best practices for mainstreaming gender in policy development and parliamentary work.

Evaluating the Gender Sensitivity of Parliaments: A Self-Assessment Toolkit, 2016

Parliaments from all around the world have used the self-assessment toolkit for gender-sensitive parliaments as a crucial resource. The method involves answering questions about the policy frameworks and work of the parliament concerned.

Partnerships

The IPU is a Permanent Observer in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). It works with the UN and other specialised agencies on a variety of issues including strengthening parliaments, human rights, gender equality and child protection, HIV/AIDS, health, sustainable development, migration and refugee protection.

The following are some important bodies/agencies the IPU has established partnerships with:

- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
- World Health Organization (WHO)
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- International Labour Organisation (ILO)

The IPU has worked with UN Women, aimed at promoting women's political participation through awareness tools and co-organising parliamentary meetings at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

The IPU's Engagement with Civil Society

The IPU engages and partners with different organisations, NGOs, civil society partners, academicians, think tanks and other relevant organisations in the following ways:

Public Engagement Hub

This hub supports peer learning and knowledge exchange about public engagement with parliament. The hub encourages and assists parliamentarians to expand their public engagement and good practices with others. It is jointly coordinated by the IPU's Centre for Innovation in Parliament and the International Parliament Engagement Network (IPEN). It brings together parliamentary staff, academics, civil society and others to share their experiences.

Permanent Observers

The IPU has granted permanent observer status to about 70 organisations, enabling them to attend and actively participate in their bi-annual Assemblies. Permanent observers fall into the following groups:

- Organisations that are part of the United Nations system
- Regional intergovernmental organisations
- Regional, sub-regional or geopolitical parliamentary assemblies or associations
- International non-governmental organisations
- International political party federations
- Other partner organisations

Practical Modalities of the Rights and Responsibilities of Observers at IPU Meetings

- For inter-parliamentary organisations and international political party federations, observer status can be granted only to those that have an official status and common objectives with the IPU.
- Observers are entitled to register a maximum of two delegates to Assemblies of the IPU.
- Observers do not enjoy the right of reply or the right to raise points of order.
- Observers will not enjoy voting rights and the right to submit candidatures.
- Representatives of international organisations having particular expertise in a subject may be by the Presidents of Standing Committees to be present in an advisory capacity during the work of a drafting committee.
- Observers cannot present draft resolutions or amendments but can submit their suggestions separately.
- An evaluation of the situation of observers is made every four years.

Consultation with Civil Society

The IPU organises webinars/seminars and publishes reports which include and encourage civil society participation, including experts supporting the work of parliaments, international organisations, NGOs and development practitioners and researchers.

The IPU has conducted research and series of focused discussion with civil society groups and people from communities to set out a roadmap for an inclusive public participation in law-making and decision-making processes within the national parliaments. The findings and recommendations emerging from the research have been put together in the **3rd Global Parliamentary Report 2022**. This report takes a detailed look at why public engagement matters and how parliaments across the world are engaging with the communities they represent. The key recommendations are primarily to build a culture of engagement across parliaments, ensure inclusive participation of community members to influence issues taken up by parliaments, and be responsive by conducting regular advisory meetings and collaborations with CSOs and other stakeholders to develop good-practices for public engagement.

Recommendations for women's rights organisations to engage with the IPU

- Identify and collaborate with women caucuses within respective national parliaments and with the Forum of Women Parliamentarians for different capacity building initiatives to enhance women's political leadership.
- Participate in the Public Engagement Hub of the IPU through its webinars or by reaching out to them at gpr@ipu.org.
- Register as Observers at the IPU Assemblies to actively participate and raise issues related to gender discrimination and to further the goal of representation of women in parliaments.
- Review the 'Women in Parliament' report published annually by the IPU and submit if any.

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About APWLD

The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) is the region's leading network of feminist organisations and individual activists. For over 35 years, we have been carrying out advocacy, activism and movement-building to advance women's human rights and Development Justice.



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