



PROPOSAL FOR A PARLIAMENTARIANS NETWORK FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION AND HUMAN SECURITY

PROBLEM

While there have been more or less effective moves towards institutionalizing conflict prevention in some countries and international organizations, the political will for early preventive action has yet to materialize.

Experience shows that political will and leadership are key to consolidating stability and peace. National parliaments have an important role to play in setting the political agenda towards conflict prevention and sustainable human security. Parliamentarians in particular have a championing role to play in shaping political space to include conflict prevention within the security dialogue.

The involvement of Members of Parliament (MPs), senators, and members of Congress in advancing effective national preventive policies and structures is part of the process of incorporating the legislative arm of states in international diplomatic efforts towards preventing violent conflict. Moreover, as peoples representatives, parliamentarians are particularly well placed within their respective states to understand and provide solutions to the many intricate issues that often contribute to conflict.

The case for the initiative is that such a network will effectively address existing gaps in the development of national and international prevention architecture and policies, improve policy coordination, and heighten awareness amongst the media and the general public that conflict prevention and human security are core national interests for all parliaments and governments.

PROPOSAL

The Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention and Human Security (Parliamentarians Network) will be an international, non-partisan, standing-structure of parliamentarians from countries across the globe working at the national and international level to gear legislative mechanisms and procedures to direct political will and resources towards preventive action and human security.

By reinforcing government accountability to parliament, including reporting duties on pending violent conflict, raising political attention to the need for effective preventive diplomatic action, and stressing the importance of preventing violent conflict as a key national interest with the media and the public, parliamentarians can help to re-frame the traditional security policy debate from focusing on hard security issues towards a more holistic approach, including soft security issues.

For example, MPs from nations with a history of violent conflict and who have the potential to develop national conflict prevention capacities will benefit from the advice and support of their parliamentary peers from other countries. At the same time, even in nations where frameworks for conflict prevention and human security do exist, being kept aware of the situation on the ground in other states is crucial to effectively promoting knowledge and understanding at the national and international level of countries that are at risk of falling into violent conflict.

On this last point, countries that have advanced conflict prevention capacities will have the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience with states that are still developing national conflict prevention structures. Other countries that have good conflict prevention capacity and also have experience in dealing with inter- and intra-state violence will provide network members the opportunity to gain first-hand practical information.

International Panel on Conflict Prevention and Human Security

In addition, linkage with the proposed International Panel on Conflict Prevention and Human Security (Panel) through a joint secretariat will add to the legislative focus of the Parliamentarians Network a complementary engagement of the executive branch. As a result, parliaments and governments—in addition to affiliated academics and think tanks, civil society organizations (CSOs), military, donor groups, and the business community—can develop a cross-sectoral approach to building national capacity, resources, and effective responses to threats of violent conflict and issues of human security. In working towards its mission, the network will improve parliament as well as government interest in conflict prevention and human security issues, raise accountability levels, and build national capacity to foster preventive diplomatic action.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PARLIAMENTARIANS NETWORK

There are a number of parliamentary networks working in the conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and human security fields. Some are global in scope while others are regionally based. Many identify peacebuilding as their main aim, and include conflict prevention activities as part of their broader organizational interests.

The Parliamentarians Network is unique and distinguishable from existing networks in that it will:

- ◆ be a global network of parliamentarians working proactively at the national level to implement the above principles;
- ◆ be a standing-structure that will work to unify the efforts of and strengthen cooperation among existing national structures to address systemic factors that contribute to violent conflict, such as the effects of climate change or poverty;
- ◆ focus exclusively on conflict prevention and human security;
- ◆ be a practical, action-oriented structure for parliamentarians focused on improving political frameworks within their countries in order to foster preventive action; and
- ◆ benefit, through its affiliation with the Panel, from the support of and cooperation with academics and think tanks, political decision-makers, CSOs, donor groups, military, and the private sector to build national capacity in their respective states towards a culture of conflict prevention.

The network will be a key tool towards building political will for conflict prevention at the national and, as a result, the international level. It is a niche for its members to more effectively influence legislation towards preventive diplomatic actions and human security issues. Building political will and resources towards conflict prevention and human security at the state level will make it easier to improve conflict prevention architecture internationally.

PARLIAMENTARIANS NETWORK ACTIVITIES

The Parliamentarians Network activities will be influenced by a set of guiding principles, which if implemented will improve conflict prevention policies at a national and international level. This means, for example, that network members will:

- ◆ put pressure on their national governments to develop improved peacekeeping strategies;
- ◆ advocate within parliament for devoting national resources to prevention efforts through specific budget lines;
- ◆ call on national parliaments to adopt a ‘whole-of-government’ approach (coordination of foreign, development, and defence policies) as a precondition for a more effective focus on preventive diplomacy;
- ◆ advocate for the acceptance and implementation of the Responsibility to Protect into practice politically, legally, and institutionally;
- ◆ work towards finding a global, political consensus on the criteria for intervention in case of genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity;
- ◆ work towards a stronger entanglement of early warning, experience-sharing, reporting, preventive deployment, and preventive action, and secure its institutionalization at the UN level; and
- ◆ advocate for the advancement of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Actions like these will help reduce the long term costs of conflict on nation states and help strengthen the capacity of states to respond early to threats of violent conflict with effective diplomatic measures rather than react with costly military and post conflict ones. In addition, creating stability and peace is crucial to achieving sustainable development, which is in line with the Millennium Development Goals.

PARLIAMENTARIANS NETWORK STRUCTURE

The Parliamentarians Network will be open to all sitting members of legislatures and parliaments at federal, national, and regional levels.

The Parliamentarians Network will be established as a complementary structure to that of the proposed Panel. Both the Parliamentarians Network and the Panel would operate with the support of a joint Secretariat, led by an Executive Director.

The network, while reserving membership to MPs, will seek to establish cooperative working links with other organizations, such as NGOs, foundations, academics, businesses, and the media, etc., who are similarly committed to avoiding the outbreak of violent conflict.

In its first phase, parliamentarians considered champions of conflict prevention from both northern and southern countries will form a nucleus group of “Parliamentarians for Conflict Prevention and Human Security”, which will then grow into the full network.

The work of the Parliamentarians Network, such as agreeing its focus issues and determining the scope of its activities, will be guided by an Executive Council composed of interested Parliamentarians Network members of global representation and directed by a Chair, who might

also maintain a seat on the Panel. Executive Council positions and the Chair, as well as other positions deemed necessary, will be elected by a majority vote of all network members.

To encourage active network participation, all parliamentarian members will be involved in the decision-making process by voting on proposals put forth by the Executive Council. Due to a large expected membership, decisions will be made by majority vote.

Focus Issues

The Parliamentarians Network will work in a number of different issue areas to influence parliamentary support for preventive diplomatic action and improve capacity and structures for conflict prevention activities. As capacity grows, the proposed network may decide to create issue-specific committees as part of its structure.

The network will specifically seek to influence better coordination amongst Parliamentary Committees (by calling, for example, for joint sessions of the Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Development Committees) and relevant government departments, and work to properly resource prevention activities.

NEXT STEPS TOWARDS LAUNCHING THE NETWORK

The EastWest Institute's International Task Force on Preventive Diplomacy has undertaken a wide range of international soundings amongst parliamentarians and parliamentary organizations to assess receptivity towards the network.

The Task Force is now looking to form a nucleus group of 8-10 champions of conflict prevention from both northern and southern parliaments who will guide the work of the network during its first phase of establishment, with an expected launch event at the European Parliament later in the year.

The Task Force is also looking to secure membership of sitting parliamentarians who actively support the initiative and will work towards implementing its aims and objectives. Additionally, members will be asked to commit publicly to the network.

Concurrently, the Task Force is working to secure funding from key stakeholders to ensure that the Parliamentarians Network will be fully funded for a period of 3 years from September 2008.